

AT THE PLACE * * *
WHICH IS CALLED * *
* * * CALVARY

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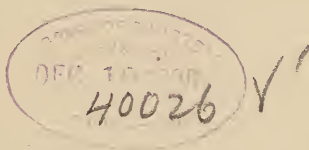
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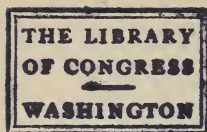
BY
EDWIN H. BURGESS,
MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL.

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I Dedicate
THIS LITTLE VOLUME
TO
MY MOTHER
AND
MY SISTER MAGGIE.



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I.

AT THE PLACE WHICH IS CALLED CALVARY.

A COMMUNION SERMON.

“And when they were come to the place which is called Calvary.”—LUKE xxiii. 33.

NEARLY 1,900 years ago a certain baby boy was born. Four thousand years before that His birth had been foretold. When Adam fell, the Lord said to the Tempter: “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel”;* and He referred to this child. Jacob speaks of Him when he says: “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a ruler’s staff from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto

* Gen. iii. 15.

Him shall the obedience of the people be." * The brazen serpent, the sacrifices, the priests, the cities of refuge, were but types of Him. Moses speaks of Him as a Prophet, David as a Priest, Isaiah as "Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." † He is the golden thread that runs from Genesis to Malachi. All eyes were looking for Him, for bright things were promised for His advent. Oh, surely when He does come, He will be welcomed with loud acclaim! Surely earth will catch up the angelic strain, "Glory to God in the highest"!

Well, He comes. Angels hail Him with anthem. A star appears in His honor, and leads the way to His cradle. Let us arise and follow that star, that we may join in His welcome and do Him homage. We stop at the Temple, saying, "Surely He is here"; but the priests have heard nothing of His advent. We hasten to Herod's palace, thinking He may be there; but He is not. We enter Simeon's house, for we remember that "it had been revealed unto

* Gen. xlix. 10.

† Isaiah ix. 6.

him by the Holy Ghost that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ." * But no; the old saint has not seen Him. Still the star moves on, and on we follow. But see! It stops! The Promised of the Lord must be there! And where do we find Him? In a crowded cave which served the purpose of a barn, "because there was no room for them in the inn." † "Born in a stable and laid in a manger."

But hark! What means this uneasiness in the royal palace? Herod is seeking His young life to destroy it. "Arise," Joseph, "and take the young child and His mother and flee into Egypt." ‡ An infant exile! "Despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not." §

Twelve years pass, and we find Him in the Temple astonishing the Rabbis with His questions and answers, and then for eighteen years

* Luke ii. 26.

† Luke ii. 7.

‡ Matt. ii. 13.

§ Isaiah liii. 3.

He drops almost entirely from our view. But at the age of thirty—a comparatively young man—He comes forth as the Sun of Righteousness to lighten this dark world. Though poor and homeless, with only twelve humble attendants, He treads the earth in the majesty of Divinity. Devils fear and obey Him; wind and wave do His bidding; disease and death acknowledge Him as their Lord. Though “in all points, tempted like as we are,” He is “without sin.”* His great purpose is to lift up mankind to perfect holiness. But with His majesty and purity is blended infinite tenderness. Very God and very man, His heart is filled with love to God and humanity. If God’s nature had not been fully revealed to man before, He, the Christ, now manifests it. We follow Him through His sojourn amongst us, and we are charmed by His hatred of everything that is mean and sinful, by His friendship, His tender sympathy, His self-denial for the sake of others, His love for all. Not alone in His power over devils and the forces of nature

* Heb. iv. 15.

do we see the God, but also in the perfection of His character. Fain would we pause at Bethany. Oh, what a heaven His company must have been to Martha and Mary and Lazarus! Fain would we linger at Gethsemane and weep over His agony on account of sin. But we cannot do so now. We must follow on. But when we arrive at the climax of His work, when we "come to the place which is called Calvary," we kneel at the foot of the Cross, finding there a theme well worthy of engaging our thoughts through time and eternity. As we consider a few of the lessons it would teach us, may the Holy Spirit apply the shed blood to the saving of souls.

I. Calvary tells of God's love to us. I say "God's love," for Christ, in His divine nature, was the Second Person of the most glorious Trinity; and through Him was expressed the love of the Three—One God. Oh, I wish we only had a greater realization of the wondrous love of God! I do not mean that we should be able to measure it. That would be idle; for God's love will ever remain to us a vast,

fathomless ocean. I do not mean that we should be able to express it. Do you not know that the hardest subject on which one can speak is the love of God—the hardest text in the whole Bible, John iii. 16? Why so? Because God's love is so great that we cannot comprehend it, much less express it. Just as one who is greatly impressed with something grand may only be able to give expression to his feelings in exclamations of rapture or awe: so, as we look into the Divine love, we exclaim "Hallelujah!" "The love of Christ which passeth knowledge."* Now I do not wish that we could express the greatness of that love. I am glad that it is so great that it is inexpressible. But I do wish we had a keener appreciation of the fact that He does thus love us. I wish we only drew near more often "to the place which is called Calvary."

"Calvary"! Oh, how that word thrills us! And no wonder, for it has thrilled the world. With what pathos, with what power, it tells the "old, old story of Jesus and His love."

* Eph. iii. 19.

And such a story! A holy God loving sinful man, and because He thus loved him, suffering and dying for him. You all know the circumstances. Man had broken God's law. Justice cried out that that law should not be trampled under foot—that its honor should be maintained. But who is going to honor it on man's behalf? Myriads of worlds cannot. Angels or archangels cannot; for, being created beings themselves, perfect obedience is required of them as a matter of duty, so that nothing they can do can honor the law on behalf of another. Then, shall man himself have to suffer the penalty?

Upon the throne of Heaven, see Him who is co-equal with the Father,—the Omnipresent, the Omniscient, the Omnipotent, the embodiment of majesty. "All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made."* He is looking down upon man, and His heart is filled with love for him,—love tender, strong, unspeakable. But see! He rises from His throne; He lays aside His

* John i. 3.

royal robes; He assumes our nature; He suffers; He bleeds; He dies. But ere He yields up the ghost, He cries triumphantly, "It is finished."* The divine law which man had broken is now satisfied. Earth and Heaven catch up the sacred shout, while Justice sheathes the sword; for God can now "be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus."†

Oh, then, if we are ever tempted to doubt the love of Christ, let us look away to the Cross. See the lacerated back and bleeding brow which tell of cruelty and ignominy. Hear the taunts and the jeers from rulers and rabble. Hear, too, the awful cry as His Father hides His face from Him, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"‡ Oh, what love He must have had to leave Heaven and to endure all that He did endure, for His enemies. Oh, what love that He did not descend from the Cross when they challenged Him to do so, and let vile, ungrateful man die. Oh, what love is expressed in that triumphant shout,

* John xix. 30. † Rom. iii. 26. ‡ Mark xv. 34.

“It is finished.” It is past our comprehension. We are awed by its greatness.

To-day we are met to celebrate the Lord’s Supper. What should be our feelings on such an occasion? There are very many who seem to think that before they can worthily partake of it they must conjure up a spirit of sadness. They feel as if they were called upon to sympathize with Christ in His sufferings. And so they go to the Lord’s table as they would to a friend’s funeral—the whole soul is draped in mourning. For this reason many do not enjoy the communion season. It is a burden to them.

Now, while there should be great solemnity, there should be no depressing sadness. For we do not celebrate the death of a dead Saviour, but of a risen and exalted one. The Bible indeed says, “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord’s death till He come.”* But what are we to understand by this? That through the Lord’s Supper we proclaim,—1st. That Christ has died

* 1 Cor. xi. 26.

to satisfy the demands of the law on our behalf; and therefore there is salvation through Him for all who wish to be saved from the defilement of sin. 2d. God's love as manifested in that death—that He “commendeth His own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” * To proclaim alone by the observance of this sacrament, the simple fact that Christ died, is to us relatively unimportant. But to proclaim that He died in order that we might be saved, that He died because of His love to us, gives it a new meaning. It makes the Supper an epitome of the Gospel. By this sacrament we proclaim to saint and sinner alike, the Lord's death on our behalf. Oh, then, on such an occasion as this, instead of being depressed with sadness, our hearts should rejoice in the renewed assurance of God's love. And so as we partake of the bread and wine, emblems of the body and blood of our Lord, let this thought come to our minds: these things point me back “to the place which is called Calvary,” and tell me that God loves me

* Rom. v. 8.

and wishes to save me, notwithstanding I am so unworthy, so sinful.

But if Calvary, if these emblems of the body and blood of our Lord, tell of God's love to us, do they not also appeal to our love? We are filled with admiration as we think of that Holy One suffering for man—vile, ungrateful man. But a still, small voice whispers, "This I did for thee." For thee! For me! That brings the matter home. Now what should be our feelings? If a man rushes into a burning building, and rescues another, do we not admire him? But if we are in that building, and he rescues us, how strongly it appeals to our gratitude and love. We would feel that we could never repay him. Then shall we have less gratitude, less love, to the God-man, who with a love beyond our loftiest conceptions, voluntarily leaves a glorious Heaven, and gives Himself up to suffering, privation, and insult, and finally to an ignominious and awful death, that we might be saved from sin? Can we witness that betrayal and denial without wishing to be true to Him? Shall we see Him buffeted

and spit upon for our sakes, without espousing His cause? Shall we see Him in the garden mourning over our sins, and not mourn over them ourselves? He was crowned with thorns for us. Shall we not crown Him king of our hearts? He died to obtain our freedom. Shall we not be His willing followers forever? Oh, that the love of Christ might constrain us—that we might love Him, because He first loved us.

“ This it is, O God, that moveth me,
And draweth out my soul to sigh for Thee :
Upon the Cross I look,
I see Thee bear it all, and meekly die ;
And then my heart leaps up in one great cry,
My soul is moved within me at such love.
O God, my Lord, were there no heaven above,
Or hell below, yet still my love and fear
Would centre in this thought : Thou, Lord, art near.
Nor hope, nor heaven have I but thus to be
A ransomed sinner, ever, Lord, with Thee.”

II. But while Calvary proclaims God's love, it also proclaims His justice—that while He loved man and wished to save him, He would not do so at the expense of His own law. The demands of Divine justice must first be met before He can be merciful. And so it was in sat-

isfying these demands that the wondrous love of God was revealed. Standing between the outraged law and the sinner, Christ, by satisfying the demands of that law, manifested the love of God. If He had not been so just we would never have known that He was so loving.

There is a great deal of comfort for the Christian in the thought that God is absolutely just. If in order to save us, He had violated justice and truth, what guarantee would we now have that He might not again violate His word, and cast us aside? But when, rather than these should be trampled under foot, the Second Person of the Godhead humbled Himself, and suffered all the shame and ignominy that was heaped upon Him, we are now assured that having told us that if we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, He will keep His word; for justice and truth, as well as mercy, are pledged to its fulfilment. Let us think of this when we approach the Lord's table.

But what consolation can the unrepentant have from the fact that God is so unswerving

in His justice? None whatever. Those who hold that because Christ has died for mankind everybody will be saved whether they serve God or not, have a wrong idea of the Atonement. They speak as if Christ had bribed Justice to be lenient. Whereas He died in order that God might be able, in consistence with the honor and satisfaction due to His own law, to save all who wish to be reconciled to Him, and to be freed from sin. Christ Himself tells us that the design of God in giving up the Son was "that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life." * Thus far Divine Justice can go without violating its principles, but no further. It does not, nor cannot, pardon those who instead of submitting themselves to God hold out in rebellion against Him. For let it be remembered that it never has, and cannot, relax its demands. It is just as uncompromising now as when man first sinned or when Christ died on Calvary. Justice knows no such thing as mercy. Those who believe in Christ are saved, not because

* John iii. 16.

Justice is merciful, but because Christ has met its demands for them. Therefore those who will not accept Him as their Saviour, who will not submit to God, and strive after holiness, must bear the shaft in their own bosom.

Those who hold this theory have also a wrong idea of what salvation in its fulness means. They think of it as simply a getting to Heaven. But as it also and chiefly means restoration to the image of God, to be made holy as God is holy, and as holiness on the part of those who are capable of choosing involves choice, an act of the will, it must be evident that before we can be saved we ourselves must choose it, and aspire after it. Therefore it is further evident that any theory of the Atonement which holds that because Christ has died every one will be saved, irrespective of the way they live here, is a contradiction in terms; for from the very nature of this salvation those who are in full possession of their faculties must choose it before they can become partakers of it.

Let not, therefore, those who are out of

Christ when they see the emblems of the body and blood of our Lord, think that these have no message for them. As plainly as these point back "to the place which is called Calvary," and declare Divine justice, so plainly do they proclaim to the rebellious that unless they take advantage of the provisions of grace which Christ has wrought out, they must themselves bear the full penalty of the law on account of their misdeeds.

One word more before passing from this part of the subject.

If Calvary proclaims Divine justice, does it not therefore show us the heinousness of sin? We compute the heinousness of a violation of our earthly laws by the penalty enforced. For some offences it may be a fine, for others imprisonment, for others death. Because society is not perfect the punishment may not be in proportion to the crime; yet that punishment is meted out to lawlessness according to the views of its enormity entertained at the time by society at large. In the same way we can tell the heinousness of sin in God's sight.

Moreover, as He is absolutely perfect His estimation of sin and its penalty must also necessarily be perfect. Now when He wished to save us, how much did it cost Him to satisfy the demands of His own law which we had broken, so that salvation might be offered freely to all? Nothing short of the humiliation and death of the Second Person of the Godhead. Enormous, then, must sin be when Divine justice, that never errs, demanded such a price.

There is an unhealthy sentiment abroad concerning sin. Persons style it as simply a "misfortune," an "idiosyncrasy," a "weakness," a "foible." In many quarters, society winks at it, unless the offender loses his reputation; and then if he is cast aside it is not because of his vileness, but because that vileness has become generally known. With them character is nothing: reputation is everything. A recent writer* in the *Chicago Herald* says: "A lady said to me once, 'I demand good manners before good morals from my acquaintances. Bad morals

* Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

can be hidden; bad manners cannot.' ” I suppose this statement expresses the feelings of many. With them it is more heinous to violate the rules of etiquette than to sin against God. Polish is more sought after than principle. And so there are courted in society those who, while they are so polite as almost to bow to their own shadow, are so vile that it would be becoming in them to cry, “Unclean! unclean!”* We are thus reminded of the state of society in France just previous to the great Revolution, when it was taken as a maxim that “*manners are morals.*” God have mercy on society when sin is lightly thought of, when in its estimation “vice itself loses half its evils by losing all its grossness.”†

Come with me, my brethren, “to the place which is called Calvary,” if you wish to estimate the heinousness of sin. There the Son of God is hanging upon the Cross. Earth spurns Him; Heaven hides its face from Him. Why is He there? Because of our sins. He wished to save us; but Justice said, Before you can do

* Lev. xiii. 45.

† Edmund Burke.

so, yourself must suffer. Here, then, we get a true estimate of sin's enormity. Nothing short of the sacrifice of God Incarnate can atone for it. Do we think of that when we engage in overt acts of transgression, or cherish wrong feelings, or live in utter forgetfulness of God's claims upon us? Nothing short of the sacrifice of God Incarnate! Oh, that I could send these words ringing from pole to pole until earth realized what a heinous thing sin is. How forcibly this truth should be impressed upon us when we see the emblems of the body and blood of our Lord.

III. But we must not leave this subject without noting that Calvary proclaims the offer of salvation to all. Some of our good church fathers held a different view. They taught that Christ only died for a part of the race. Which of these views is correct? This is a vital question. Can we stand up and say indiscriminately to sinners, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters,"* "and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely"?† Or shall

* Isaiah lv. 1.

† Rev. xxii. 1.

we say, Ho, every one that is elect, come ye to the waters? When a sinner comes to us burdened with a sense of his guilt, shall we quote from our Confession*—"By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto eternal life, and others foreordained to everlasting death. These angels and men, thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number is so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished,"—and then say to him: My dear brother, if you are one of the elect God will save you; and if you are not, you need not bother your head about it, for it will not make the slightest difference? Or shall we say to him in the words of Paul to the Philippian jailor, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved"?† When we appear at the judgment-seat is Christ the Judge going to say: I died for you; therefore you may go to

* I borrow this thought from the *New York Evangelist*.

† Acts xvi. 31.

the right. I did not die for you ; therefore you must go to the left ?

If Christ only died for a certain number, and if from all eternity these persons are fore-ordained to everlasting life and the rest of mankind to everlasting death, regardless of their own choice, man is not a responsible creature. He is simply a machine in the hands of his Maker. And this the Confession teaches. For although in one place it denies that "violence" is "offered to the will of the creatures," yet in the very next sentence it as plainly asserts it. It says, "Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass, upon all supposed conditions, yet hath He not decreed anything because He foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass, upon such conditions."

Does it follow, then, if God condemns the sinner who has thus been reprobated from all eternity, that that condemnation redounds to His glory, or as the Confession says, "To the praise of His glorious justice" ? I fail to see it. For the Bible teaches us that sinners will be

condemned on the charge of wilful disloyalty, not because they were reprobated. Now, if God condemns them on a false charge it is surely unjust as well as untruthful. This is a fact that certain gentlemen seem to forget. They argue that God can in justice foreordain sinners to everlasting death. Grant it. But would it be just to condemn them for refusing to accept salvation when He had foreordained that they should not accept it? I would ask these gentlemen to ponder over the words, "God is not a man, that He should lie." Furthermore, if the condemned one before His bar should say, "I am not responsible for my condition; I am but fulfilling my Creator's will concerning me; as Christ did not die for me, and as it was never intended that I should be saved, I do not see how I can be held accountable," what would "the Judge of all the earth" reply?

And what is the logical sequence of the doctrine of the Atonement and Election as they are stated in the Confession? I heard it expressed a few years ago in the village of Newcastle, N. B. I was in the waiting-room of the

• railway station. From the trainmen's room I heard a theological discussion. And one man, not in the tone of bravado, but of conviction, said: "Well, my opinion is that it amounts to this—if we *are* to be saved, we *will* be saved; if we *are* to be lost, we *will* be lost." Perhaps you say: He was uneducated, and could not draw fine distinctions. I reply: He went straight to the logical sequence without being hindered by fine distinctions. But education also gives the same verdict. Two Presbyterian ministers of unquestioned standing in the church, and of many years' experience, have admitted to me that they did not see much use in preaching the Gospel. "God has His elect," they said. "Those that *are* to be saved *will* be saved; and those that *are* to be lost *will* be lost." And in making this declaration these gentlemen were true to their creed.

But what does the Word of God say? "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life."* "And

* John iii. 16.

He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.”*
“And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And he that heareth, let him say, Come. And he that is athirst, let him come: he that will, let him take the water of life freely.”† What do these passages teach us? That Christ died for the whole world; and now all who will, may be saved. They but express in other words the old message which God sent to the house of Israel by the Prophet Ezekiel, “Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?”‡

And do we not come to the same conclusion ourselves when we rightly consider the holiness of God? But what do we mean by Divine holiness? Simply that God is unswerving in His justice, and in His hatred of sin? Or does it necessarily include anything else? I do not

* 1 John ii. 2.

† Rev. xxii. 17.

‡ Ezekiel xxxiii. 11.

see how it is possible for any being to be absolutely holy without possessing all the finer feelings in their perfection. "Divine holiness," says Henry B. Smith, "excludes all moral imperfection and all moral impurity." Or, in other words, it means moral perfection. But how can there be moral perfection without love and mercy? While these indeed in a perfect being must necessarily square with his justice, they must also of necessity be there in all their fulness. And so the Bible says, "God is love." Not merely that God loves, but "God is love."* Love is in His very nature; it is wrapped up in, and necessary to, His moral perfection. Love and mercy are of necessity just as much the attributes of a holy God as justice. Suppose that Christ had only been just, would we have regarded Him as a perfect, a holy Being? We would not.

In short, holiness, instead of being a single attribute of God, is the sum of all His moral attributes. So that the answer in the Westminster Shorter Catechism to the question,

* 1 John iv. 8.

"What is God?" which reads, "God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth," should stop at "holiness," for what follows is included in that.

But Prof. Shedd says, "We can say that God may be merciful or not, as He pleases; but we cannot say God may be just or not, as He pleases." But I hold that while God is not under any obligation to us, yet from His very nature, to be true to Himself, He must be merciful where *such does not conflict with His justice.*

And does not our own experience teach us that love and mercy, as well as justice, go to make up holiness? For the nearer we attain to perfection, are not these developed within us as much as the other? Thus we are led to contemplate the infinitude of the love and mercy of God who is infinite in holiness. And so while we look at man's unworthiness we are amazed, we are filled with awe, at the manifestation of Divine love in Christ; yet when we contemplate the nature of God we feel that

such love is only what might be expected in One so holy. What richness does this thought give to the Divine proclamation, "Jehovah, Jehovah, a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin: and that will by no means clear the guilty." *

And now, my dear brethren, that Jesus Christ, by honoring the law on our behalf, has satisfied the demands of justice, could we not argue from the very nature of God, from His holiness, even if the Bible had not so plainly proclaimed it, that He would offer salvation to all, and that whosoever will may take the water of life freely?

My brethren, I believe in such a thing as Election; but I do not believe in such an election as would take away our individual responsibility. When God condemns a man, it is because that man is to blame—it is because he did not live up to the light which he had. "This is the condemnation, that light is come

* Exodus xxxiv. 6, 7.

into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." *

I believe in a system of theology that magnifies the sovereignty of God; but not at the expense of His moral attributes, nor of man's accountability.

I believe that those who reject the light which they have will be lost.

I believe that it is only through the merits of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate God, that any one can be saved.

But I hold that our Church should have no room in its Standards for any theory of the Atonement or of Election that does not coincide with the 16th verse of the 3d chapter of St. John's Gospel: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life." Oh, I bless God for this verse. It is a perfect system of theology boiled down. Salvation offered to all freely. Therefore, this morning, as "an ambassador on behalf of Christ," I proclaim to every unsaved

* John iii. 19.

person present that God loves you and wishes to save you. You may be as poor as Lazarus ; you may have hated the Church with all the fiery and zealous hatred of a Saul ; you may have been of the character of Manasseh, who seduced his subjects "to do that which is evil more than did the nations, whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel,"* ay, you may even have been as great a hypocrite as Judas Iscariot, who betrayed his Master with a kiss. But if through Divine grace you surrender yourself to God, He will not only free you from the penalty of the broken law, and when you die, take you to Heaven ; but, what is infinitely better, He will free you from the power and defilement of sin, and give you a love for holiness, thus fitting you to enjoy Heaven.

"God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life." Let us carry these words away with us. It is the message which the emblems of the

* 2 Kings xxi. 9.

body and blood of our Lord peal out in loving tones to the sinner. It is the message which we behold in awful, grand realization, when we "come to the place which is called Calvary."

II.

JESUS OUR FRIEND.

“He that maketh many friends doeth it to his own destruction: but there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.”—PROVERBS xviii. 24 (Rev. Version).

“HE that maketh many friends doeth it to his own destruction,” says Solomon. He refers to the “hail fellow, well met.” To the man whose friendship is easily won. Who is attracted by pleasant manners more than by noble virtues. Such an one with a generous, open heart, often meets those who, while he is prosperous, profess strong friendship for him. But instead of being true friends, too many of them but tend to draw him down. They know how to borrow money of him; they get him to endorse notes, and too often leave him to meet these when they mature. They entice him from the path of true manliness, frequently even into drunken-

ness and immorality. They corrupt his morals and they prey upon his purse. And too often they are the very first to push him when they see him going down-hill. Truly a man that maketh many such friends doeth it to his own destruction.

But friendship has a brighter, a better side. So in contrast to these many false friends Solomon places the true—"but there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."

The word "*friend*" in this latter part of the verse is not the same word in the original Hebrew as "*friends*" in the first part. Here it has a stronger meaning. It is from the verb meaning "to love." "There is a loving one that sticketh closer than a brother," would be a more exact rendering.

"There is a loving one that sticketh closer than a brother." I wonder if Solomon had reference to any particular person when he wrote this? Amidst all the glitter of court life, and the falseness of many courtiers, I wonder if his mind turned to some one whose love he could not doubt, and whose friendship, nurtured by

that love, was stronger than life itself? I wonder, too, if his thoughts did not turn to that best of all his friends, the One who had taken his father David from tending the sheep to make him the leading general in Israel, so that he received more honor than even the King himself; the women, in long procession, singing, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands."* That Friend who afterward made his father king, blessing him with all covenant blessings; and upon his death gave the throne to Solomon himself, and made him the centre of an admiring world. Oh, surely Solomon's heart must have been very hard, very ungrateful, if when he penned these words, "There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother," his thoughts did not soar above earthly things, and fix themselves upon Jehovah, his father's God and his God.

"There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." As we read these words our minds turn away from the falseness and chill of the world to some loved one—a mother, a sister, a

* I Samuel xviii. 7.

friend. We feel that we could stake our lives on that loved one's fidelity. But above all, our thoughts rise to that dear One who loved us so much that He died for us—to Jesus, the best of all friends, God manifest in the flesh. It is about Him that I wish to speak this morning.

I note, first, that Jesus is a royal friend. Would we not feel ourselves very much flattered if we had as a friend some great earthly monarch? Our children and grandchildren would speak about it with pride long after we had gone. But earthly rulers, no matter how great, are as nothing when compared with our Royal Friend. For they but rule for a short time, while it is His will to permit, over a comparatively small district, and are liable to all the troubles to which flesh is heir; but He is from everlasting to everlasting, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Creator and Governor of the universe. Jesus is truly a royal friend.

And as He is royal, so He wields all the power that belongs to His position. He who had as a friend Alexander, Cæsar, or Cromwell,

had the protection of a mighty arm. But these were mortal, subject to all the vicissitudes of our race, and finally they themselves were overcome by that mighty giant, Death. But our Friend, King Jesus, is the Almighty One. He is not limited by any power outside of Himself. All the forces of nature, all powers, angelic and human, are subject to His control. "He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?" *

Now consider the great privilege of having such an One as a friend. And not merely a friend as that word is often understood, but a companion who yearns over us with all the warmth and the depths of His infinite love. For we have our burdens which are too heavy for us. Some of our earthly friends would gladly bear a share of them; but very often they cannot. And even they themselves, while they would relieve us, groan under the weight of their own troubles. But our Friend, King

* Daniel iv. 35.

Jesus, the Almighty One, is able to bear the troubles of the world; and His heart is so full of love and sympathy, that He wishes to do it. No matter how slight the trouble may be, it is not too small for His sympathy; no matter how great, it is not too heavy for His shoulder. Is it a burden of sin under which we groan? He can remove it; and give us instead, "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding,"* which the world can neither give nor take away. Are we weighed down with bereavement? He can bless it to our souls, and enable us to say, "Blessed be the name of the Lord." Is there any other trouble? Is there a combination of troubles? He who has King Jesus for his friend can cast his burden upon Him, and He will sustain him, for "He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved."† Do we fear the Tempter? Do we dread those sweeping attacks upon our souls? King Jesus has conquered the Prince of the powers of darkness; and now through Him we can come off "more than conquerors."‡ Do we

* Phil. iv. 7. † Ps. lv. 22. ‡ Rom. viii. 37.

fear Death, that grim King of Terrors? King Jesus has grappled with him, subdued him, and forced him into His service; and now, to the Christian, he is but the messenger of peace that calls the soul to Heaven. Do we shiver as we think of the grave? King Jesus has lain in it, and has taken away its chill, and has made a bed of peaceful rest until the bright resurrection morning. And now the child of God can sing, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."* Do we fear the Judgment? His power extends even there. He will be the judge; and He will remember in mercy all those who put their trust in Him. Oh, He is a kingly friend. No other royalty like His royalty! No other power like His power! No other friendship like His friendship! What should alarm us if we have Him with us? We have no foe to meet but what He has already met and conquered. No power in earth or in hell can harm us if we are the friends of Jesus the King.

* 1 Cor. xv. 55, 57.

I note further that Jesus is an old, tried friend.

Other things being equal, we have more confidence in our old friends. Others came, and they went; but these have remained true to us. When we are in trouble, and want advice, we generally prefer to go to some old friend. We are sure of his sympathy. We can open our hearts to him better than we can to others. We feel that what we say to him is just as safe in his keeping as in our own. When we are tired with work, and want to have a half-hour's pleasant chat, it is an old friend that we again seek out. Somehow we are more at home chatting with him than with most persons. We feel that he is glad to see us; and that he is not wishing in his heart that we would stop troubling him, and go away. We value our old friends. When Jesus calls one of them to Himself we feel that there is one tie less binding us to earth, and one more drawing us to Heaven. Oh, bless God for old friends. Bless God for the friendship of your faithful partner in life, who has always stood true to you, no matter who for-

sook you or what the trouble was. Let us bless God for father and mother, whose friendship is as old as our existence, who watched over us in our younger years, who tended us when we were sick, who worked for us, and deprived themselves of a thousand things that we might be benefited. Yes, let us bless God for all old friends.

But I point you to One, this morning, whose friendship is older than any earthly friendships. Before we were born, He was our friend ; ay, even before the foundation of the world. For, when the fall of man was foreseen, and Justice demanded that the penalty should be enforced, He stood forth as our friend ; He said, " Lay the guilt upon me." You can value the friendship that has lasted for five years, ten, twenty, thirty years ; and other things being equal, you value it in proportion to its age. But what think you of a friendship a thousand years old, two thousand, five thousand years, ay, that goes away back into eternity ? Surely a friendship like that is worth the having ; surely it is worthy of the name. Jesus, then, is an old friend.

But, as we have already said, He is also tried. You get into financial difficulties. Then, if while many give you the cold shoulder through fear that you should ask them for assistance, one stood by you, and, because he loved you, helped you to get on your feet again, and cheered you on in the path of uprightness, you would consider that person a tried friend. If any of us should so forget ourself as to leave the ways of godliness and virtue; and while others sneered at the mention of our name, a loved one remained true, and prayed for and labored with us, we would call that one a tried friend. But suppose that for our sakes Queen Victoria should give up her throne and her wealth, and should endure hardships and privations. Oh, what a great friend we would consider her. Just think of it. A queen, the ruler of an empire that engirdles the globe, the greatest empire the world has ever seen or probably ever will see, suffering thus for another. What matter for wonder it would be. Newspapers throughout the world would be full of eulogies; history would hand down her

name in emblazoned letters. But Jesus proved His friendship, His love, for us in a more striking way than even that. He was not only a King; but He was "King of kings and Lord of lords." He was not only Ruler of this world, but also of the myriads of worlds that float around us in space. Heaven was His throne. So far is He above earthly rulers that even Queen Victoria and the Emperors William Francis Joseph, and Alexander, and the Presidents of France and these United States of America, have to do Him homage, not as under-sovereigns, but as unworthy sinners, no more regarded by Him, than you, or I, so far is He above them. So far are the pleasures of Heaven—the pleasures which were His—above those of this world, that, as Moore, the Irish poet, so beautifully says :

"Go, wing thy flight from star to star,
From world to luminous world as far
As the universe spreads its flaming wall;
Take all the pleasures of all the spheres,
And multiply each through endless years,
One minute of Heaven is worth them all."

Yet so great was His friendship, His love,

toward us, for our sakes He gave up for years His throne, His wealth, His pleasure. For our sakes He became poor. Though the Creator of all things, He had not where to lay His head. For our sakes He suffered Himself to be despised, spitefully entreated, and spit upon, the object of the bitterest malignity of men and of devils. He endured most indescribable agony ; He died for us ; died that we might be saved ; died willingly, because He loved us. Oh, did He not thus give us a strong proof of His friendship ? Do you want that proof made stronger ? Then ask yourself, What was our relation to Him then ? Were we His friends ? Oh, no ! We were in open rebellion against Him. We were traitors. We were trampling upon His law and His love. We were as the viper that stings to death the breast that warms it to life. "While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son." * Jesus is an old, tried friend.

I note, again, the constancy of Jesus' friendship.

* Rom. v. 10.

Much of earthly friendship is very fickle. To-day we regard a person as a friend ; to-morrow he may be as cold as a stranger, he may be our enemy. His friendship was sincere while it lasted ; but he became alienated from us, perhaps by something we did, or through some misunderstanding or false report. Again, a person's friendship for another may gradually become weaker and weaker, until it altogether becomes extinct. There is a tinge of sadness in this thought, for it forces this other thought upon us that some of those we love, and who love us, may cease their intimacy, may forget us, may hate us. Oh, much of earthly friendship is very fickle. And, as we think on this with pain, the question arises : What about the friendship of Jesus ? Will it ever grow cold to those that love Him ? And the answer comes from the throne of the Almighty, " I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee." * " Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love ; therefore, with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." † " Can a woman for-

* Heb. xiii. 5.

† Jer. xxxi. 3.

get her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, these may forget, yet will I not forget thee."* Jesus is not only a royal, old, tried friend, but He is an everlasting friend to those who have accepted Him. He knew all about us when He entered into the friendly compact with us, and therefore our imperfections, our eccentricities, are not going to dampen His feelings toward us. No misunderstanding can alienate Him. Oh, what a wonder it is that we do not more admire the constancy of His friendship. We are not so slow to appreciate constancy in earthly friendship. We look with veneration on that aged couple, who, having set out together early in life, have been faithful to each other under all circumstances. And now as their sun is declining in the golden West, though their step is feeble, and the face wrinkled, and their shoulders are bent with age, they are just as young and attractive to each other as in the days of the long ago; and lovingly, hand in hand, they "totter doon" the

* Isaiah xlix. 15.

hill, to "sleep thegither at the foot," so that together they may rise when the trump of the Archangel sounds, and hand in hand enter into the regions of eternal bliss. We never tire reading of the constancy of the friendship between David and Jonathan; and we are ready to mingle our tears with the former as, forgetful of the throne upon which he was so soon to sit, he wails for his friend. But as the moon and stars pale in the presence of the sun, so the most striking cases of earthly friendship, tender and grand and soul-inspiring as they may be, fade into obscurity as we contemplate the friendship of Jesus. Were I but able to realize it myself and to describe it to you, we would have hearts of flint if it did not move us to tears. But it is so great that no human being, in this world at least, can comprehend it. When we are able to fathom the sinfulness and degradation of this lost world, and the hatred which Christ bore against sin; when we can compute what it cost Him to give up the glories of Heaven, and suffer as He did for us; when we can sum up the number of times we sin against Him, day by day trampling

His law and His love under foot, and bringing reproach and contempt upon His cause; when we can tell how faithfully, amid all our unworthiness, He pleads our cause as our "Advocate with the Father," then, and not till then, can we realize to any comparatively great extent what is meant by *the constancy of Jesus' friendship*.

And should not this faithfulness on His part be a matter of great comfort to us? For there are times in the history of perhaps many of us when human friendship seems to be but a mockery. The clouds gather over and around us, and the storm bursts upon us in all its fury. And as we struggle for life the world seems coldly indifferent, and no one offers us so much as a mite of sympathy. Everybody seems to pass by on the other side, and some pass by with a sneer. There are times, too, when dear ones are taken away, and some we loved and trusted prove false, and everything seems dark, and we feel that we are alone. Now, what a comfort it is on such occasions to know that Jesus never fails those who love Him. Other friends may forsake, or distance may sep-

arate them from us, or death may snatch them away. Or while they are so friendly that did they but know our troubles they would hasten to help us, they may be entirely ignorant of them. But Jesus is a friend that knows all our circumstances better than we do ourselves. He is a friend that never forsakes His friends ; who stands by them in adversity as well as in prosperity ; who cannot be separated from them. For while distance may separate our loved ones from us, Jesus is, in the highest and best sense of the word, an ever-present God. While death may take away our loved ones it cannot separate Jesus from His friends, but rather brings them into His immediate presence, where they shall see Him, face to face, in all His noonday glory. " For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." *

I also note the intimacy of Christ's relations

* Rom. viii. 38, 39.

with His people. He says: "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends." * "If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." † "If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." ‡ Jesus is pre-eminently the "friend that sticketh closer than a brother." He is a bosom friend, a companion. And oh, how delightful He is! How grandly noble! Those who know Him the most, love Him the best; those who know Him not, know not what it is to be truly happy. And because He is so intimately connected with His people they can tell Him everything. We cannot do this with any one else. Little things happen which we like to keep from our earthly friends. There is always some 'skeleton in the closet.' But there is something so kind, so inviting about Jesus that the Christian is led to tell Him everything—to unburden himself of

* John xv. 15. † John xiv. 23. ‡ Rev. iii. 20.

all his troubles on the bosom of his Lord. There is no 'skeleton in the closet' when we are with Him. And never is He indifferent to our wants, but always ready to sympathize and to help. If we are perplexed about our path of duty He is ready to lead us, so intimate is He with His people. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him."* Are we filled with joy? How pleasant it is to share it with some loved one, and by sharing, multiply it. The mutual relations between Jesus and His friends are so tender and deep that we can tell Him everything. And He who drinks of the joys of Heaven, ay, who is the Author of joy itself, condescends to partake of ours and to share His with us. "If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."† But let us remember that our intimacy with Him must not be that of undue familiarity, but that which is begotten of adoration, simple trust, and love.

* James i. 5.

† Rev. iii. 20.

Jesus, the "friend that sticketh closer than a brother," pleads, unsaved sinner, for your friendship. Besides being of all friends the dearest and the best, He is the one that you need the most. He of all others is the one whose friendship you cannot afford to do without. The time will come, if it has not already arrived, when you will be sorely tempted, and you will need His power then. You will be bereaved and sorrowful; and you will need His sympathy then. You may be sick; and you will need His promises then. You will have to die, and you will need Him, oh so much, then. And after death is the judgment; and how are you going to do without Him then? But death may come at any time. You may never see another day. Therefore you need Him now—this moment. And you may have Him now. This moment He stands pleading with you. "Behold I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." *

* Rev. iii. 20.

III.

IS NOT THIS THE CARPENTER?

“Is not this the carpenter?”—MARK vi. 3.

PERHAPS the reader, without any special study of the text, may find in the fact that Jesus had been a carpenter, and was the reputed son of a carpenter, the cause of His rejection by the people of Nazareth. But such could not have been the case.

The Jewish rabbi was not permitted to make any charge for his official duties, though indeed he might accept a moderate sum, “not as payment, but only to make good the loss of time which he might have used for his profit.”

Now, while some of them became wealthy by marrying into rich families or by marrying their daughters to persons of wealth,—for it was considered a great thing to marry a rabbi or the daughter of a rabbi,—yet each of them was

required to learn a trade by which to support himself. It was held in the time of Jesus that study and labor should go hand in hand. "For this reason," says Delitzsch, "famous teachers not only carried the chairs on their own shoulders to the college, because all labor calling for physical exertion was regarded an honor, but a certain Phinehas was cutting stones, when the stone-mason was informed of his election to the high-priesthood. Rab Joseph turned the mill; Rab Shesheth dragged beams, highly praising this diaphoretic labor, and more than a hundred rabbis, whom the Talmud mentions, were both artisans and bore artisan names." This same writer also says, "Another famous teacher who lived in voluntary poverty was *Judah bar Illai*, a cooper by trade, who dwelt in the town of Usha, in Galilee, and who carried to the college the cask, seated on which he used to lecture." Even Hillel, who is popularly regarded as the greatest of the rabbis, "supported himself by the labor of his hands." And there is an old saying that "when a man teaches his son no trade, it is as if he brought

him up to highway robbery." So you see, therefore, that Christ would not be rejected by His fellow-townsmen because He had worked at the carpenter's bench, or that Joseph, His reputed father, was also a carpenter. The words, "Is not this the carpenter?" spoken by some, and "Is not this the carpenter's son?"* spoken by others, was not said in derision, as if these were things to lower a man; but rather to indicate their acquaintance with him. Just as we would say, Why, we know this person. He is the village doctor, or postmaster, or carpenter. They might, indeed, have meant to infer that He had never been ordained as a rabbi. But the chief thought which they wished to express was that they knew Him. Now Christ was working great miracles, and was addressing the people in the language of authority. For you will notice that He did not speak as did the Jewish teachers, basing His instruction on previous statements of other rabbis, saying, for instance, Rabbi Shemaiah says so and so, and Rabbi Hillel says so and so, and Rabbi

* Mat. xiii. 55.

Somebodyelse says so and so. But His language is, "I say unto you." "He taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes."* Now these things astonished His townsmen, and caused them to question among themselves. They acknowledged His great wisdom and power; but they seemed to think that He was working through the powers of darkness. "Why, we know this man," I imagine I hear them say. "Is not this the carpenter?" "Is not this the carpenter's son?" To have one who had been brought up among themselves manifest such greatness all at once was more than they could stand. The prophet had no honor in his own country.

Our text supplies us with the only information which the New Testament gives regarding the occupation which Christ followed before He entered on the active work of His ministry. But the statement itself is evidently a correct one. It was made by His fellow-townsmen as a matter of fact on which they had no doubt; for though it is in the shape of a question the

* Mat. vii. 29.

form of the Greek sentence expects "Yes" for an answer, so that it is really a strong affirmation. It could not have been a lie which had been gotten up with the purpose of injuring Him, for first, as we have already seen, "all labor calling for physical exertion was regarded an honor" among the Jews; and second, the statement was made, not after deliberation on the matter, but spontaneously, as one would speak of a thing with which he was familiar; and this, too, in the place where Christ had been brought up, and where a lie of such a nature would not have been believed. Besides, it is recorded by two of our Lord's own friends, one of whom was an Apostle, without any contradiction. And is it not in accordance with our feelings to think that before Christ entered on the active duties of the ministry He worked at something?—for, first, we cannot conceive of Him growing up in idleness; and second, it was becoming that He who came to earth to fit Himself to be our High-Priest, as well as to die for us, should know by experience what toil is. Now, as it was customary for the son

to follow the trade of the father, if Joseph was a carpenter, Christ would naturally work at the same trade.

Does it jar your feelings to think that Christ worked at a carpenter's bench? Celsus, a Greek philosopher of the second century, seems to have sneered at this, for Origen, in replying to him, says that Mark vi. 3 should read like Matthew xiii. 55, "Is not this the carpenter's son?" But text criticism goes against Origen, and upholds the present rendering, "Is not this the carpenter?"

I bless God for these words. Though uttered by His enemies as they rejected Him, they have had, and will continue to have, a blessed influence on the world. Let us learn some of the many lessons that they would teach us.

One lesson that is impressed upon us is: It is not the position, but the character, that makes the man. There are those who despise in their hearts everything in the shape of manual labor. There are mothers who would be horrified at the thought of their dear boys learning a trade or working a farm. They must be professional

men, or in some other nicey-nice way support themselves. Thus they have spoiled many a good farmer and mechanic. There are young men who would consider that it would be lowering to go into a blacksmith-shop to shoe horses, or to work at a carpenter's bench. There are those, too, who would not care to associate with one who earned his living "in the sweat of his face," no matter how noble and intelligent he might be, while they would be elated at the thought of being seen in the company of the lordly libertine, or with the man of wealth, even though that wealth had been obtained by cruelty and fraud. If such persons had lived when our text was spoken they would have considered it a greater honor to be the companion of Governor Pilate than of the Incarnate God. Now, my dear friends, Jesus has so honored labor that the world should be more than ever impressed with the fact that it is not the position that makes the man, but the character. All honest work is honorable, and all dishonest work is dishonorable. Rather be an honest

bootblack than a scheming, dishonest millionaire. Show me the man that has the true ring about him, the man of good common sense, of honesty, purity, and sobriety, with a heart full of love to God and humanity, and I will show you one who is worthy of our warmest recognition, irrespective of his dress or position in society. I think it was Robert Burns, Scotland's favorite bard, who was once taken to task by a scion of some lordly house for stopping on the street to speak to a roughly-dressed farmer. Burns turned to him with the slashing reply, "My good sir, for true nobility that man is worth you and me, and ten such men any day."

A man is, not as the world may estimate him, but as God sees him. Now, God has given us different gifts. He has fitted one for this position and another for that. For you see that if all men were to occupy the same position, the world would never get along. If every one were a merchant, who would do the farming? If all followed the professions, where would be our mechanics? So God has fitted some to be farmers, others to be mechanics, others to be

merchants, others for the professions, and so on. Now, while He does this as a matter of economy, He does not say that the one who occupies the high position is better than the one who occupies the lower. Men may say that, but God says that the best man is the one who fills his position the best—the one that is most faithful to his Lord and Master. And thus the Lord will reward us in the other world. Then many who have been exalted here, who have amassed fortunes, commanded armies, or ruled empires, may be rejected, while to many who have had but the one talent, and who have lived in obscurity, He will say, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”* Thus we see that it is not the position that makes the man, but the character.

We also see this truth exemplified as we look at some of the bright men of our race who have worked at manual labor for their living. Moses and David were shepherds; the Prophet Elisha was a farmer; Paul was a tent-maker;

* Mat. xxv. 34.

Peter and Andrew and James and John were fishermen. Coming down nearer ourselves, we find that John Bunyan was a tinker; the Hon. Alex. McKenzie, ex-Premier of Canada, was a stone-mason; Hugh Miller, the great Scotch geologist, was a common quarry-man; Elihu Burritt, the Christian philanthropist, who could read some forty languages, was a blacksmith; Dr. Livingstone, the great explorer, was a factory hand; Michael Faraday was a bookbinder; D. L. Moody and Albert Barnes worked in tanneries; and President Lincoln was a rail-splitter. And of Him who appeared in the fulness of time, who belongs to no particular age, and whose character was so grand that it cannot be accounted for except on the theory that He was divine, it was said, "Is not this the carpenter?"

Let us draw two lessons from this:

1st. Let us strive by God's help to fill our present positions to the utmost of our ability. It is laudable for a person to endeavor to rise in the world when he has before him as his guiding star the glory of God and the good of

his fellows ; but let us not be ambitious for worldly promotion for its own sake. Rather let us desire to fill the place in which we can render the most service to the cause of God and humanity, no matter how obscure that position may be. Let us be zealous to do the greatest possible amount of good that we can while we live here, that the world may be better because we have passed through it.

2d. Let us not despise any one because of his position, if that position be an honest one. You cannot tell the quality of a man's goods by his sign-board. Many an obscure laborer may be filling the place to which God has assigned him better than many of those who occupy the high positions ; in the sight of God he may be accounted their superior ; and in Heaven, granting that many of them will get there, he may occupy a position relatively as far above them as they now do above him.

Another thought that is impressed upon us by the text is that Jesus can sympathize with us in our daily troubles. If He had taken upon Himself the form of an angel we would have

felt that He could not fully sympathize with mankind. If He had come as a great king or as a wealthy aristocrat, we might have thought that He could not enter into the feelings of the poorer classes. But when He comes as a poor man, when He works at the carpenter's bench, we know that He wishes to show us that He has no respect of persons, and that He can sympathize with even the poorest. To me there is a great deal of comfort in the thought that for years the God-man earned His living "in the sweat of His face." When, after a hard day's work, or when Saturday night comes, you are so fatigued that you can scarcely drag one foot after the other, with sore head, sore back, sore arms, sore sides, sore from head to foot, how pleasant it is to go for sympathy to that dearest and best of all our friends ; for having Himself been often worn out after a hard day's work, He knows just what it is, and is therefore able to sympathize with others under similar circumstances. This thought comes to me whenever I read the beautiful story recorded in the 4th chapter of St. Mark's Gospel, from the 35th

verse. All day Jesus had been working miracles and teaching the people, so that when the evening was come, perhaps to get a little rest for His worn-out body, He told His disciples to go over to the other side of the lake. And now, as their little vessel heads away from the shore, I can see Him rise, and, taking a cushion that was on board, double it up for a pillow, and lay Himself down to rest. He falls asleep. But soon there arises a great wind, one of those sudden and violent storms to which the Lake of Gennesaret is subject, and the waves beat into the vessel, and the spray, I suppose, dashes over Him ; but He is so worn out that He does not waken. The storm gets so bad that those fishermen who had been used to the lake all their lives get afraid, for their boat is filling. But He still sleeps on. At last they waken Him ; and with the voice of command, He " rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm." Whenever I read this, while I see the Omnipotent God, I cannot overlook the weary man. And I cannot help thinking that

now, as our High-Priest before the throne of the Father, He has a brother's feeling for those who are fatigued such as He was. This, indeed, may appear to some a very slight thing in view of our greater troubles. But oh, here is just where the beauty of it comes in, that just as the loving mother will sympathize with the little troubles of her child, that others do not think worth noticing, so Jesus will stoop to sympathize with His children in the comparatively little troubles which they otherwise would have to bear alone, because they are so common. I wish we had a greater realization of this blessed truth that the God who cares for the sparrows, and who numbers the very hairs of our head, does not consider any of our troubles too insignificant for His attention. I think that many of us have much unnecessary pain and worry, because we act on the principle that we can only take the heavy, crushing sorrows to God. So we carry about the thousand little things that annoy and make life miserable, when we might have lain them on Jesus, and be living in the full sunlight of heavenly

joy. Do you not know that one of the reasons why God permits sorrow to come to His children is that they might thereby, just as the child is drawn by its troubles closer to its mother, be drawn closer to Him, and get acquainted with His great, loving, sympathetic heart? As there is no trouble too heavy for Him to bear, so there is not one so small that does not appeal to His sympathy. Therefore, my dear Christian friends, learn to take all your troubles, great and small, to your Lord. Are you worried about household matters? Are things not going as smoothly as you would like? Or perhaps the flour-barrel is getting empty, and the clothes are beginning to shab, and the shoes are breaking at the side, while the purse has very little in it. Perhaps you have to endure unpleasant things at your daily work on the farm, or in the shop, the store, or the office. Or perhaps you are daily beset with fierce temptations. Now, while you do your utmost to better your condition, do not neglect to tell these things to Jesus; and if He does not take them away, He will give you strength to bear them. If you are

striving by Divine grace to serve God you can take all your worries and troubles and temptations, whether great or small, whether in private life or social, business, political or religious, and cast them on the shoulders of the sympathizing Omnipotent. I know that He who for our sakes was poor and hungry and homeless, who was misunderstood and slandered and tempted, who suffered physical pain, and whose soul was "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," * Jesus, God-Incarnate, has still a fellow-feeling for His people in all their troubles. "Jesus wept." † Precious words these; for they are spoken of One whose character is unchangeable, "the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever." ‡

The workingmen of England had reason to rejoice that under the last Gladstone administration a workingman was appointed to the position of Under-Home Secretary. They thus had as their representative, in a high position, one who would naturally understand their needs, a fellow-workman, one of themselves.

* Mark xiv. 34. † John xi. 35. ‡ Heb. xiii. 8.

But with what unspeakable, greater reason we have to rejoice that we have, as our representative in Heaven, Him who sits upon the eternal throne, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the God-man, Jesus, of whom it was said, "Is not this the carpenter?"

"Seeing, then, that we have a great high-priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high-priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."*

Blessed be God for the words, "Is not this the carpenter?"

* Heb. iv. 14-16.

IV.

SETTING THE PLUMB-LINE.

“Then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb-line in the midst of my people Israel.”—AMOS vii. 8.

YOU know what a plumb-line is: that it is a line with a plummet at the end of it, which is used by masons and bricklayers by which to run up a wall perpendicularly. In the chapter before us the Prophet Amos sees the Lord standing upon a wall “made by a plumb-line, with a plumb-line in His hand.” “Then said the Lord, Behold I will set a plumb-line in the midst of my people Israel.”

You will notice that the Lord was standing upon this wall, not as a builder, for the wall was already built, but as an *inspector*. Thus God stands in all ages as the inspector of nations and of churches, and of individuals. His plumb-line is in His hand; and by that He will judge us.

What is God's plumb-line? Before I answer that, let me mention a few things that God's plumb-line is not.

1st. It is not our *own depraved ideas of things*. Sin not only hardens the conscience, but often convinces the wrong-doer that many sinful things are not sinful at all. The understanding becomes more darkened; the judgment more perverted. And so it is a common thing for men to argue that certain gross acts of immorality are not sinful. The feelings perverting the judgment—"the wish the father of the thought." Many consider trickery nothing more than shrewdness, for which they deserve great credit, and of which they boast. There is no harm, they say, in telling a lie, or in taking an advantage of a man. No harm in taking up a scandalous report against their neighbor's character, and to spread it around with far more zeal than they would his virtues. No harm in desecrating the Lord's day. No harm in dishonoring gray hairs, if their own vanity is thereby flattered. But because certain people consider these and other sins to be not

sinful, is God going to judge them according to these ideas? Oh, no. He will judge them by His own unerring plumb-line. In speaking of persons we sometimes hear it said, "He does not see the heinousness of his sin"; as if that were an excuse. But if a man chooses to allow his passion or greed or vanity thus to blind his eyes, if he refuses to read God's word that he may find the truth, it is his own fault; and the fact that, under such circumstances, he does not see the heinousness of his sin, will not make the offence any the less in God's sight, nor turn aside the sword of Justice. *Remember that we are responsible, not only for the light which we have, but also for that which we might have had if we had done our duty.*

2d. God's plumb-line is not *Popular Opinion*. It is by this that man often judges. We praise that which others praise; and look down upon that which others despise. We are apt to go with the crowd. When it cheers we cheer; when it hisses we hiss. Now this would be all right if the crowd were infallible. But we know that popular opinion is very uncertain. One

day it strongly applauds an action that the next day it as strongly condemns. Sometimes it is on the side of virtue, and sometimes on the side of vice—sometimes for God, and sometimes for Baal. Bismarck once said that some time before that persons, to show their hatred of him, would grossly insult him on the street. They cheered him now, he said, but in a short time they might be insulting again. Rienzi was so popular with the Roman people that, though poor, he was able to drive from the city its robber nobles, and to rule as Tribune. In seven months so unpopular did he become that no one answered his summons to defend the city against its enemies; and he had to flee. Some six years later he was appointed by Pope Innocent VI. to rule Rome under the title of Senator; and he was welcomed with hearty, earnest manifestations of joy. But in four months his palace was burned by an infuriated mob, and he was murdered. We see Christ Himself so popular with the people that they spread branches of palm-trees, and even their clothes, as a carpet over which He might ride;

while on all sides they shout, "Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest." Five days later they cry out, "Not this man, but Barabbas." "Away with Him, away with Him." "Crucify Him, crucify Him." Popular opinion is more rightly called a weathercock than a plumb-line. Blessed be God, He will not judge us by that. Yet how many there are who strive to frame their actions by it. We find this among all classes. Especially is it noticeable among the public men of this country. Many of them study how they can catch or hold the rabble vote. And so we find men, themselves Protestants, who are ever ready to cater to the Papacy, and especially to denounce everything British, just to please and catch the Irish Romanists. Shame! that these representative men should so degrade their manhood and dishonor their country! Shame! I say again.

But what shall I say of ministers of the Gospel who in the attempt to win applause, or fearing lest some one might take offence, withhold truths that should be loudly proclaimed? Not

many years ago, a minister in the State of New York, in whose congregation many were far from being orthodox, and who even differed in their heterodoxy, was asked by a brother minister how he managed to please such a congregation. "Oh," he replied, "I just preach science." God help us! How many there are who, in the attempt to be popular, keep back plain, essential teachings of God's word; while they deal out to souls, starving, dying, on the brink of eternity, little but husks.

Among all classes we find men who crave after the praise of the world. God tells them to do something; but they first want to know if it will take well. The great questions with them are, "How is this going to please?" "I wonder if any one will be offended?" They would sooner do wrong than face adverse criticism. They want to bask forever in the sunshine of popularity. And so by the weathercock of public opinion they strive to build their lives. I say nothing against popularity in itself. It is a good thing when it comes in a right way, and does not sweep a man off his

feet. But do not let us crave after it. Let us do our duty to our God and our fellows, regardless of the consequences. "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." Remember that we may be popular with man, and yet be "found wanting" when tried by God's plumb-line; that we may be applauded by the world, while we are despised and condemned by God.

3d. God's plumb-line is not *the law of the land*. One may do something that is not condemned by that law, that may even be authorized by it, and yet in God's sight it may be sinful. For sometimes earthly laws are directly opposed to God's laws. In one or more European countries brothels are licensed by government, and men are ready to argue that because thus licensed they are lawful; as if the license, the law of the land, made it right in God's sight. In our own more Christian country we license the sale of strong drink. *But does God approve it?* Without violating the letter of the law, men take advantage of each other. We have a statute of limitation. That is a good thing

in itself. The business world could not get on well without it. But suppose a debt is contracted? Months and years pass. At last the creditor sends in the account.

"Oh," says the debtor, "I do not owe you anything."

"Yes, you do," says the creditor. "I sold you these things myself, and you have not paid for them."

"But that was so many years ago," says the debtor. "The law of limitation has cancelled this account. Therefore I owe you nothing, and I will pay you nothing."

In the eyes of our statute-books that man is innocent. In the eyes of God he is a base swindler: *for the law of limitation never cancels an honest debt in God's sight.*

But why do I mention these? To show that as there are certain things that are not contrary to the letter of our earthly laws that are sinful in God's sight, therefore He will not judge us by these laws. Yet how often do we find men taking shelter from their crimes behind the statute-books. They seem to think that if

these sanction or do not condemn their actions, that these actions are legitimate. They forget that they are answerable to a higher law—that our statute-books are not God's plumb-line.

God's plumb-line is not the law of the land, not popular opinion, not our own depraved ideas of things. Then, what is it?

God had given the Children of Israel His word as a guide to direct them in private, family, and national matters. As good masons build according to the plumb-line, so God wished them to take His word as the rule of their lives. This, then, is the plumb-line with which God was to inspect the Children of Israel. In other words, it is Perfection. It does not allow of any deviation. By this same perfect word He will inspect us. Blessed be God it is not a strange plumb-line, but the one which He has given us for our daily guidance.

“Then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb-line in the midst of my people Israel.”

I note that God will inspect our bad work with His plumb-line. “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret

thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." * He has the right to do this; for He is Lord of all. He has the power to do it; for He is omnipotent. We can hide nothing from Him; for He is omniscient. We may sometimes do certain things, regarding which, if any one spoke to us, we might say, "Oh, that need not concern you. That's my own business." But there will come a time when we will find out that it is not altogether our own business after all. The Lord is going to put His plumb-line to our actions; and if we have not acted uprightly with our God and with our fellows He will want to know the reason why. And when He does this, He will do it with such power that we will not care to question His authority. There are many who can sin with impunity, so far as earthly laws are concerned, because of their high position; but there are none so high that God cannot bring them down. We may evade the law here through a technicality; but God judges according to Truth. There are sins that are not punishable in the eyes of our law;

* Eccl. xii. 14.

but there are none such in the eyes of God. Therefore He is going to judge "those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow and the fatherless." He is going to judge the liquor-sellers, whether licensed or unlicensed; from the man who owns the fine distillery, and has one of the best pews in church, to the man who runs the low den in the alley. He will measure the tears of orphans they have caused to flow; He will fathom the sighs that have come from broken-hearted fathers and mothers, and wives and sisters, because of strong drink; He will compute the sins which they have caused to be committed, and the souls they have driven to destruction. There may be secret sins that are yet hidden from the world, and those who committed them may be congratulating themselves that they will never become known. But these sins are not so secret as they might wish them to be. God knows all about them. The slander that was uttered in the ear, with the caution, "Now, on your honor, do not say I told you about this," God heard it. The stumbling-block that was put in a

brother's way, God saw it. The dishonest transaction, God was watching it all the time. The manufacturer may adulterate his goods, and sell them for the pure article. The store-keeper may measure his merchandise so adroitly that, though the customer be looking on, he steals an inch from every yard; he may have one pair of scales for buying and another for selling; he may have one price for those who know the value of his goods, and another price for those who do not. The clerk may pilfer. The shoemaker may put bad leather in our shoes and charge us for good. The carpenter may use No. 2 boards when the contract calls for No. 1. The servant may waste his employer's time when that employer's back is turned. We may do wrong in many ways, without letting the world know anything about it. But we cannot hide these things from the great, all-seeing Eye. "For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and He pondereth all his goings."* "There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide them-

* Proverbs v. 21.

selves." * Even their thoughts are plain to Him, with all their gross impurities and schemings and plottings. "Be sure your sin will find you out." † "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." ‡ God is going to drag our sins to the light, and answer will have to be made for them. He is coming down with His plumb-line in His hand. And He will try our ledgers by it, and the way we made our money by it; and our home conduct; and our conduct while we were away from home when we thought no one marked our steps.

Let none, then, congratulate themselves on pleasure or wealth or honor, that does not rightly belong to them. Let none picture to themselves future happiness as the result of wrong-doing. Let none pride themselves that, because the plumb-line has long been withheld, it will be withheld forever. "*The mills of the gods grind slowly; but they grind exceeding small.*" God will bring all our works into judgment. Our sins, even those that have long

* Job xxxiv. 22. † Num. xxxii. 23. ‡ Gal. vi. 7.

been forgotten by us, will come trooping up; and they will halt before us; and we will have to answer for them one by one. "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." *

I note further that God will inspect our good works with His plumb-line.

For convenience, let us divide good works into two classes—those that are done through worthy motives, and those that are done through unworthy motives. The Lord is going to bring them all into judgment; and to separate them the one from the other. I thank God for this. For there are many who are misjudged. A person gives to some good cause because he loves God and humanity; and there are those who turn up the nose and say, "The old hypocrite! He only did it to be seen of men—it's only to draw custom." Another person gives through selfish motives; and many praise him for it. It is hard for us to tell the one from the other. But God will try these

* Eccl. xii. 14.

by His plumb-line. He will not make a mistake in judgment. Therefore I want to say to those who give through unworthy motives that it is not going to do them much good. Men may praise them, and build monuments for them when they are gone; but the Lord will not praise them. But I want to say to those who work and give for God's glory, that no matter how man may misjudge you, God will smile upon you, and in the presence of men and angels will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." * It is with the Lord, then, that we have to do. Never mind what the world thinks.

Yes, God is going to set His plumb-line to our good deeds. As He will bring out our secret sins, and make us answer for them, so He will bring out your secret good deeds, and bless you for them. That time you slipped the piece of money into the hand of the deserving poor, and then hurried away with blushing face for fear some one would see you—*God saw it*. He saw you that time you got a certain poor but

* Matt. xxv. 21.

industrious woman, who had a starving family at home, into your house. And after you had given her something substantial to eat, you went up-stairs and brought down this good dress and that good shawl and a dozen of other things; and as you gave them to her you made her promise that she would say nothing about it. You then read to her from the Bible, and knelt with her in prayer. When she had gone, the tear of pity came to your eye; and as it dropped, God caught it up, and made it into a brilliant diamond for your heavenly crown. And that cold, rainy day, when the little boy, hungry and ragged and shivering, asked you to buy a paper, instead of doing so you slipt him a shilling. And when, having got over his astonishment, he ran after you, and said, "Please what's your name?" you smiled and said, "Oh, never mind that; you be a good boy; won't you?" You did not want these things to become known. But do not flatter yourselves that you can go on doing these deeds of mercy without being found out, much though in the goodness of your heart you

would like to do so. God is watching you. He will set His plumb-line to your actions. And that loving smile which was intended to cheer the lonesome and the downcast ; and this visit to the poor or the sick or the bereaved, where you made everything so bright because you brought Jesus in with you ; and that time you sat up with the sick person ; and that other time when you pointed the prodigal to Christ ; and this cheering word and that kind act, done in the name of the Master ; although we may know nothing about them, God is going to bring them to the light. I imagine I see the blush of modesty on your cheek as He says to you : " I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat ; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink ; I was a stranger, and ye took me in ; naked, and ye clothed me ; I was sick, and ye visited me ; I was in prison, and ye came unto me." * And I hear you say, " Lord, when saw we Thee ahungered, and fed Thee ? or thirsty, and gave Thee drink ? When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in ? or naked, and clothed Thee ? or

* Matt. xxv. 35-40.

when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee? And the King shall answer and say: Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

But I note further, that God will inspect our religion with His plumb-line. It is sometimes hard for us to tell the Christian from the man of the world. Together they come into the house of God. They sit together in the same pew. They blend their voices in the same hymns of praise. In time of prayer they both bow the head. When the offering is taken up, they both contribute. The one listens as attentively to the sermon as the other. As we see them there we cannot tell by their deportment which one is the Christian, or if both are, or neither. We go into the prayer-meeting. There the Christian prays, and there the hypocrite. Yet we cannot tell by their prayers which is the Christian, and which the hypocrite, or if both are Christians or both hypocrites. We sometimes say, "That man is not a Christian," when he is. We say, "That other man

is," when he is not. With our present powers of discernment, if we were to sit in judgment on our fellows, we might place some at the left hand who should be at the right, and some at the right hand who should be at the left. Now, should it not be a blessed thought to all those who are honestly striving to do His will, that God is going to set His plumb-line to our religion? There need be no fear that He will make a mistake, for He judges by the heart. What great reason the true child of God, unworthy though he may be, has to rejoice; while "the sinners in Zion" should be afraid, fear should take hold of the hypocrite.

Yes, God is going to put our religion to the test. He will not judge us in a crowd, but individually. "Each one of us shall give account of himself to God."* We will see, then, that it is not enough for us to make a profession of religion. Every Christian, indeed, should show his colors; but one may wave the Lord's flag while he is in the Devil's service. Not long ago I called on a man who sold liquor and kept

* Rom. xiv. 12.

a disorderly house, to induce him, if possible, to act differently. How did he receive me? He told me that he was "*just trusting in Jesus.*" Oh, my dear brethren, "Faith without works is dead." * "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of Heaven." † We will also see that it is not enough for us to be orthodox. The head may accept while the heart rejects. I think James must have met some who trusted in their orthodoxy; for he hurls at them one of the finest pieces of sarcasm that ever descended upon the head of any man: "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well; the devils also believe, and tremble." ‡ Neither is it enough for us to occupy a position of responsibility in the Church. Jesus says, "Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works?' And then will I profess unto them, I never

* James ii. 20.

† Matt. v. 20.

‡ James ii. 19.

knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." *

What, then, is necessary? Let us look to the plumb-line by which we will be judged. "Ye must be born again." † "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." ‡ "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." § "Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." ||

The religion of Jesus Christ is something more than a business or social convenience. There are too many who profess it for the dollars and cents it brings them. The Devil does not want any more of a man than that he become a false professor of religion, a man whom the world cannot trust—a policy Christian. Such an one does more for the cause of Satan than a dozen ordinary out-and-out infidels or drunkards or debauchees; for he lowers Christianity in the eyes of the world, and by

* Matt. vii. 22, 23. † John iii. 7. ‡ Acts xvi. 31.

§ Micah vi. 8.

|| 1 Cor. x. 31.

his inconsistency drives men to infidelity and sin.

True religion is simple faith in Christ Jesus, associated with goodly living, which is the outcome of that faith. It is of such a nature as will make a man refuse to do a dishonest act even though he knew no one else would ever know it; to resist impurity even though it should be forever hidden from the world; to tell the truth even though it should seem to be a lie, and though a lie should seem to be the truth; though the truth should injure him, while the lie would help him. It is a religion that we can use every day of the week; that shines just as brightly in our working clothes as in our Sabbath broadcloth; that we can take with us into our business and our recreations, at home or abroad. It makes servants more faithful, and masters more considerate. It makes persons better parents and children and husbands and wives and friends. In short, it is a grand principle, that may be summed up in these words: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy

soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind ; and thy neighbor as thyself." *

"Then said the Lord, Behold I will set a plumb-line in the midst of my people Israel." He also will set His plumb-line to us. What are we going to do about it? For who can be just with his Maker? There is but one way in which we can stand the inspection. Let us give ourselves and all that we have to the Lord. Let us get behind the Cross. Let our daily prayer be, "Nearer, my God, to Thee"; our daily effort to do His will. Then Christ's righteousness will purge away our unrighteousness, for "the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin." †

* Luke x. 27.

† 1 John i. 7.

V.

EXCUSES.

“And they all with one consent began to make excuse.”—LUKE xiv. 18.

THE Saviour here tells us that “A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: and sent his servant at supper-time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready.” Now what did those persons that were invited do? The text tells us. “And they all with one consent began to make excuse.”

This “certain man” represents God. The “supper” represents salvation through Jesus Christ, with all its attendant blessings. And we are the ones that are invited; and some of us have been making excuses. May God help me to show you who thus act, the extreme foolishness of your position, and to urge you to

flee from the wrath to come—to lay hold on eternal life.

I. One excuse which persons nowadays make is, *I have no leisure, at present, to think about it. I know I should attend to my soul's welfare; and I hope to have sufficient leisure by and by. But, really, at present I am too busy.* My friend, when do you think you will have more leisure? Is it not likely that you will be just as busy five years hence, *if you are living*, as now? Suppose you will never have more time at your disposal:—how then?

You think that when you get old you will be able to give it your attention. Granting that you will live to be old, how do you know that you will then have the inclination to come to Christ? Have you not seen persons with hoary head and tottering step, with one foot in the grave, and the other ready to follow, without one serious thought of the world to come? I have known such persons. They had been brought up under ordinary religious influences. Probably there have been times when they

thought very seriously about giving themselves to Christ; but like some of you they put it off for "a more convenient season." But when the convenient season came they had not the inclination. Following in these persons' footsteps, what guarantee have you that you will not come to the same sad condition? You think it will be easier to turn to God when you get older. I tell you it will be more difficult; the heart will be harder, the bad habits will be more firmly rooted, and, if you should desire to be saved, Satan will harass you with doubts. The thought that it will be easier is but a delusion of the Devil.

Or do you think you will resist the overtures of mercy until you are on your death-bed? Supposing that you will have a lingering death, how do you know you will then be in possession of your reason? Fever may make you delirious; and thus you may die. But even should you remain in possession of your senses until the last; do you think that the sick-bed is a good place on which to repent? Pulse up to a hundred, head splitting, mouth parched, fever

coursing through your veins like a race-horse, and Satan whispering that awful lie, "Too late! too late!" Not long ago, a brother minister visited a young man who was dying. He spoke to him about his soul. "Oh," said that young man, "you need not talk to me. I do not believe in death-bed repentance. I refused Christ when I was well; and now it is too late. I am lost." The clergyman told him that Jesus Christ came to seek and to save the lost. That if he would but look to God He would save him. But he died without giving any evidence of having accepted salvation. Oh, sinner, when will you be wise? If you keep on in sin, how do you know that that young man's case will not also be yours? Remember that God will save you at the very last moment if you will but truly repent. But how do you know that you will?

You say you have not time. Stop a moment, and think. Is it time that you need, or the inclination? Suppose a certain man said to you, "I will give you \$10 a day if you will devote two hours of that day to me. But it is on con-

· dition that you are not to give up any of your present work." Would you not find time to earn those ten dollars? Yes. But yet you cannot find time to attend to the needs of your soul! *My friend, you will have to find time to die, and to appear before the bar of God to be judged.* Then, I beseech you, make your calling and election sure *now*.

And besides, if you have your worries and troubles and bereavements, you especially need Jesus to help you to bear them. Instead of being a hindrance, you will find Him a blessed help. You will be able to cast your burden upon the Lord who will sustain you. For my own part I do not know how I could get on without the Lord to help me. Sometimes I have felt that if He forsook me the very heart-strings would break. But I have taken the Bible and from those blessed Psalms I have read that "The Lord reigneth," * that "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer," † that "The Lord is my shepherd," ‡ and that "All the paths of the Lord are loving-kindness and

* Ps. xcvi. 1. † Ps. xviii. 2. ‡ Ps. xxiii. 1.

truth unto such as keep His covenant and His testimonies.”* I have thought, too, how He has said, “To them that love God all things work together for good.”† Then I have knelt down and told Him all—silently, perhaps, lest some one else might hear that which I would have no one but God know. And oh! the blessedness of casting one’s burden upon the Lord! It makes one feel that these burdens are a blessing because they bring us so close to Him. And what a comfort it is to know that the Ruler of the universe is our friend, and that He will give us what is best.

Even if you knew that you would live to be old, and that you would repent and be saved, you cannot afford to do without Jesus now. You should accept Him to-night; for there is a dark, swelling river ahead of you that you will have to go through. I see for some of you financial troubles. Some evening when you go home, your wife will see your troubled face, and going up to you she will put her arms about your neck, and say, “My dear, what is the

* Ps. xxv. 10.

† Rom. viii. 28.

matter?" And you will tell her that you have lost everything. Then many of your old friends (so-called) will give you the cold shoulder; and you will find it hard to make ends meet. When you have eaten your breakfast you will not know where the dinner is coming from. For others I see headaches and backaches and heartaches. I see you mourning over a loved one gone astray, who might never have done so if you had set before her the example of a godly life. For others I see the vacant chair, the empty cradle, the new-made grave. I see you stand by the window, and wonder if you will ever meet that loved one again. I hear you say, "Oh, if I had but given myself to Christ she might have done so too. I remember when she thought seriously about it, but I did not encourage her." Oh, sinner, how are you going to bear some of these burdens? How are you going to avoid the others? How? By giving yourself, body and soul, to Jesus. If your business is such that you cannot consecrate it to Him, then in God's name I beseech you to get out of that business. Do not wait until you be-

come old, or until death stares you in the face, or until "after a while." But this very night, this moment, *now*, lift up your heart to God. Say, "Lord, save me." "Now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation." *

II. Another excuse that persons make is, "*There is plenty of time.*" These do not say they have no leisure, but they think that it is not necessary to hurry over it.

"Plenty of time"! How do you know that? How long are you going to live? Ten years? One year? One month? One day? Why do you not answer? Because you cannot. And yet you say, "*plenty of time.*" You may be in good health now; but persons, just as healthy as you, have been hurried into eternity.

A few years ago, while some of the scholars at a certain school were sitting together, the question was asked all around, "What would you do if you knew you were to die within twenty-four hours?" Among them was one of the healthiest and strongest fellows in the

* 2 Cor. vi. 2.

school. When the question came to him, he replied: "If I knew I was to die within three days, I would spend all that time in making preparation to meet my God." Within three days that young man was dead. Being slightly indisposed, the doctor by mistake gave him something which threw him into a deep sleep from which he never awakened.

A good minister once dreamt that he was in Hell. There he saw Satan seated on a throne, and around him were the other fallen angels. "Which of you," he asked, "will go to the earth and keep man from serving God?" "I will go," said one. "How will you do it?" Satan asked. "I will tell them," was the reply, "that there is no God." "That will not do," replied Satan; "you can never make them believe that. There are too many evidences that there is a God. Who will go?" "I will go," said another. "And what will you tell them?" "I will tell them that the Bible is not true." "That will not do," Satan again replied. "There are too many evidences, internal and external, that it is true. Who will

go?" "I will," said a third. "And what will you tell them?" "I will tell them," he replied, "that there is no future punishment." But Satan again answered, "That will not do. Reason and the Bible both proclaim that there is. Who will go?" "I will go," said a fourth. "And what will you tell them?" "I will tell them that there is a God, that the Bible is true, that there is a Heaven to be won, and a Hell to be shunned; but I will say, *Plenty of time, plenty of time.*" And it is with this excuse that the Devil has been deluding souls for nearly six thousand years. But when he gets the poor sinner on the death-bed, he lies to him again, saying, "Too late! too late!" though God says, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." *

Plenty of time! As well might the sea captain, whose vessel was rushing on to the rocks, say to those who might wish him to change his course, "Plenty of time! plenty of time!" And I tell you, sinner, if you do not wish to make eternal shipwreck, you should change

* John vi. 37.

your course *now*, and instead of steering toward destruction, make straight for the port of Heaven. How do you know that you will live to be old? How do you know that a moment's warning will be given you, except the great warning that has been sounding in your ears that death may come as a thief in the night? Man's life, at the best, is short and uncertain. He is well to-day—within a week he may be in his grave. Perhaps even now the Angel of Death is looking at you and saying, "Just six days more, and that person must die." You may be in good health, and living in the prospect of many years. Monday comes, and the Angel says, "Just five days more." But he says it in a whisper, and you do not hear him, for health is bounding through your veins. Tuesday arrives, and you have only four days left. Wednesday, Thursday, Friday pass; but you little dream of the awful change that is so soon to take place. But Saturday morning comes. You go out as usual to your daily work. Is it an oath that is on your lips? Or is it a prayer? The sun is shining brightly,

and you are laying your plans for the future. But you have just one moment more to live. Oh, sinner, prepare to meet thy God! Cry out: Jesus, have mercy! For death is stealing up. His sword is drawn. With one fell stroke "the silver cord" is broken; and, without a moment's warning, you stand before your God. Are you ready to meet Him? What will you answer when He brings against you misspent opportunities of doing good, Sabbaths idly frittered away or more shamefully profaned, oaths, lies, dishonesty, immorality, or debauchery? What will you say when the Judge asks you why you did not serve Christ? Oh, that you would only answer these questions now in the light of eternity, and thus be led to throw yourself at the feet of the loving Saviour, who "is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through Him." *

III. But again:—there are those who admit that they would like to be saved, and they intend to accept salvation some time, but they

* Heb. vii. 25.

say they want to enjoy themselves a little first. They think that religion is a good thing for father and mother, the minister, the Sunday-school teacher, and all old or sick persons; but it is too long-faced for them. Who told you that the religion of Christ was long-faced? What right have you to perpetrate that awful slander? I must say that you are altogether mistaken. The Devil is only cheating you when he tells you that. My dear young friends, true Christianity, instead of having a tendency to gloominess, is calculated to make a person very happy. I take up this blessed Book, and I turn from Genesis to Revelation, but I find nothing to the effect that the Christian should be gloomy or long-faced. I read where our Blessed Saviour said to His followers, "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad."* I read, too, of "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding."† I also read, "The wicked are like the troubled sea; for it cannot rest, and its waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."‡

* Matt. v. 12. † Phil. iv. 7. ‡ Isaiah lvii. 20, 21.

Why should the Christian be gloomy? Because he lives in the sunshine of God's favor? Because the Spirit of God beareth witness with his spirit that he is a child of God? Because there is "no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus"?* Because He is the Son of a King who will make all things work together for His good?† I tell you, my friend, that the Christian is the only one who has a right to be happy. How can you be so, oh sinner, when down in your heart you know that you may die at any moment, and that after death is the judgment?‡ If you mean by being gloomy and long-faced, that you will have to give up sinful pleasure, I tell you most emphatically that you will have to do that. You cannot serve God and be on the Devil's pay-roll at the same time. You will not, however, be required to give up lawful pleasures lawfully indulged in. But, after all, what are the pleasures of earth, whether illicit or lawful, to that which comes by faithfully serving God?

Walking through a street in one of our smaller

* Rom. viii. 1. † Rom. viii. 28. ‡ Heb. ix. 27.

cities I more than once remarked that the buildings were beautiful. One evening after that I went to see Regan's views of Paris. Well, they were magnificent. But when I came out, oh, how mean, how insignificant these other buildings looked after having seen the magnificent Parisian buildings. So is it with sinful pleasures. How fascinating they are for a time. But get a taste of the pleasure that is to be derived from communion with God, open but your heart, and let the floods of heavenly joy deluge you, and how poor, how mean, how repulsive you will find the pleasures of sin.

IV. There are those who are anxious to be saved, and who feel that they cannot afford to delay one moment, but yet they have not taken the final step. What is hindering you? What spectre is that that Satan is putting before your eyes? Is it shame? You feel, perhaps, that if you were to become very sick, and it was thought that you would die, you could come right out for Christ, for you would be expected to do so then. If there was a great revival,

and hundreds were confessing Christ, you could do so in the crowd. It would then be fashionable. Or if all your relatives and friends were Christians, you think it would be easier. But as it is, you are ashamed. Ashamed of whom? Suppose you had a friend who was as noble as he could be, and he went through great sufferings in order to save you from an awful fate, would you be ashamed of him? Suppose, too, that that friend was a great king, and he was, oh, so handsome, and his subjects loved and worshipped him, would you be ashamed of him? Oh, no! You would be proud of him; you would ever be ready to defend his name. Now Jesus is the grandest, the noblest one, who ever trod this earth. He is King of kings and Lord of lords, the Creator and Governor of the universe. The highest angels worship Him. He died to save you, and now day by day He supplies all your wants. Oh, why then should you be ashamed of your best friend, the King? The wonder is that He is not ashamed of you. But if you continue in your course, the time will come when He will

be ashamed of you, as well He might be. He says, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He cometh in His own glory, and the glory of the Father, and of the holy angels." *

But perhaps it is the spectre of failure that Satan is putting before you. Is he saying to you, It is useless for you to give yourself up to Christ, for you will not be able to hold out; and then you will be laughed at? But I ask you, How are you going to be saved at all if you do not try? Suppose you are out at sea. You fall overboard. Instantly a noble fellow plunges into the waves to rescue you. He reaches your side as you are about to go down. He says, "Do as I tell you, and I will save you." But you reply, "I am afraid I cannot hold out." And resisting his proffered assistance you go down to a watery grave. "Oh," you say, "I would not be such a fool." I know you would not. You have too much common sense in temporal matters. But being

* Luke ix. 26.

out of Christ you are drowning in the sea of Divine Retribution. Mercy cries, "A man overboard! A man overboard!" And all Heaven is in a state of excitement, for her Prince, having robed Himself in the garb of humanity, has plunged into the waves to save you. Oh, how great must have been the chill, leaping from the embattlements of a warm Heaven into this cold world! And as He rises on the wave of worldly privation, I see Him tired and footsore, and hungry and homeless. As He rises again on the wave of man's hatred, I see that He is bleeding from head, and back, and hands, and feet, and side. I see Him buffeted and spit upon and jeered at. And as He again rises before my view on the wave of stern justice, above the whistling of the winds and the roaring of the billows, I hear that awful cry, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"* I see the hosts of Hell, headed by the great arch-enemy of souls, and filled with indescribable malignity, swoop down upon Him with awful fury. Oh, can He save you, can He

* Mark xv. 34.

save you? I look again. Oh, blessed be God! with His mighty arm He is scattering the powers of Hell. He is overcoming every obstacle. He is now by your side ready to save you with the arm of His omnipotence. Catch a hold of Him, poor sinner! He is your only hope. I hear Him say to you, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." But you reply, "I cannot hold out, and then I should be laughed at." He replies, "The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." You say, "I would like to, but I know I cannot hold out." But He says again, "He that hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Christ Jesus." "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." But you push Him away—Him that left a glorious Heaven to save you—and listening to the voice of Satan, you sink to death eternal. Oh, sinner, so wise in earthly matters, can you be such a fool?

I will admit that many have gone back into sin after having, as they had thought, accepted

salvation. But investigate such cases, and you will find that they had not given themselves up wholly to Christ, nor used all the means of grace. In many cases some secret sin had been cherished. I am fully persuaded that the great reason why so many fall back after great revivals is, that instead of using all the means that God has given them of growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they depend wholly for strength upon sentimentalism; and therefore when the nightly meetings are over their religion soon falls to the ground. And I tell you candidly, sinner, that if you are not ready to do as Christ bids you, you need not expect to hold out. But if you make a full surrender of yourself to Him, if you look to Him for strength, if you use all the means of grace (such as private prayer, the daily, prayerful reading of the Scriptures, and a faithful attendance on God's house), if you obey all the dictates of your conscience, making "no provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof," and if you work faithfully for Him (do not neglect that), all Hell

itself will not be able to drag you from the arms of Jesus.

But perhaps Satan is putting before your minds the spectre of utter hopelessness. You are saying, "I would like to be saved; but I am too great a sinner. I sinned away my chances, and now I am lost." "Lost!" did you say lost? "Lost?" Are you sure of that? Because, if you are, you are the very person I want to see. My Lord has given me a message for you. Listen to it. "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which is lost."* Now, if you are *sure* you are lost this message is for you, and Jesus is waiting to save you for time and for eternity. But you say, "I have sinned so deeply, I have spurned God's love, I have so long resisted the Holy Spirit, that I am afraid I am beyond hope." Then if that be so, you are indeed lost. But as Jesus "came to seek and to save the lost," He came to seek and to save you. Oh, sinner, would you limit the efficacy of the blood of Christ? Do you say that while it is able to wash away the sins of others,

* Luke xix. 10.

it cannot cleanse you? If so, you are insulting Christ. You are plainly telling Him that as an all-powerful Saviour He is a grand failure. You are in effect saying, that although when God gave His only begotten Son, it was His design "that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life," * yet He cannot save you. You are contradicting God's word, which says: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." † "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." ‡ But you say, "I did not mean that Christ's mission was a failure. I was looking at myself." Then look away from self to Jesus. Thank God that you feel your guilt, and that you see you cannot save yourself; but do not measure His almightiness by your weakness. "He is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through Him." § Did He not save Paul, whose hands were red with the blood of saints? Did He not save

* John iii. 16.

† Isaiah i. 18.

‡ John vi. 37.

§ Heb. vii. 25.

Colonel Gardner, John Bunyan, John Newton, Jerry McAuley, and thousands of others whose names were synonyms of sin? And can He not save you? "Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." *

Do you doubt His love, His willingness to save you? If so, stop and think. You know that He died to save you. He was not forced to do this, but He did it through love. He knew what kind of a character you would be, but still He died for you. Even now He is bidding you to the Gospel feast. You will notice in the passage from which my text is taken, that after the servant had gone out into "the streets and lanes of the city," and had brought "in hither the poor and maimed and blind and lame," "the Lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and constrain them to come in." "Highways and hedges"! Who will He find there? Why, there is a tramp under the hedge; and the

* 1 Timothy i. 15.

Lord says, "Bring him in." On the highway there is a bandit who has just murdered a man. But the Lord says, "Bring him also in." "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." There is one just like you there, oh sinner. And the Lord says, "Be sure and bring him in. Tell him that I love him still." "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?" *

If you still doubt God's willingness to save you, read in your Bible how Jesus went down among the very worst of sinners and tried to lift them up; how He never turned away any who came to Him. If that does not satisfy you, turn to the fifteenth chapter of Luke and read the story of the Prodigal. Pause when you come to the 20th verse,—“But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.”

* Ezekiel xxxiii. 11.

One day while going down Broadway, New York, I heard behind me the rapid sounding of a gong. Looking around, I saw carriages, stages, and trucks on that crowded thoroughfare make way. And through the opening came a hospital ambulance, the horse at full speed, the attendant continually sounding the gong to "clear the track." Being a little curious, I asked a policeman the cause of such haste. He answered that a man had been very seriously injured, and for that reason an ambulance had been called.* As I walked along I could not help thinking—as it is with the temporal, so is it with the spiritual. When the sinner, stricken down by the Old Enemy, and covered with the slime and filth of iniquity, sends up that heartfelt ambulance alarm to the Court of Heaven, "God be merciful to me a sinner," "the horses of fire," fresh and strong as when they drew up the sainted Elijah, spring at the call. And the Charioteer, with His

* This illustration was previously used by the author in an anonymous sermon on Luke xv. 20 (the first he ever wrote), which was published in the *Presbyterian Witness*, of Halifax, Nova Scotia, August 9, 1884.

nail-pierced hands, and nail-pierced feet, and spear-pierced side, rushing with electric speed to the side of the penitent, lifts him from the depths of sin, places him at His Father's table, and marks him as an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ.* "But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." Oh, you who doubt God's willingness to save you, look at Bethlehem, Gethsemane, and Calvary, and doubt no longer.

If time would permit, I would speak to you about other excuses. But oh, I urge you in God's name, cast aside whatever hinders you, and come to Jesus. He is now yearning in love over you. Will you not come? He will give you a most affectionate welcome. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come; and let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."† "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."‡

* Rom. viii. 17. † Rev. xxii. 17. ‡ Acts xvi. 31.

VI.

REPENTANCE.

“Then Judas, which betrayed Him, when he saw that He was condemned, repented himself and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned, in that I have betrayed innocent blood. . . . And he cast down the pieces of silver into the sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself.”—MATT. xxvii. 3-5.

“And they went out, and preached that men should repent.”—MARK vi. 12.

WHAT are we to understand “Repentance” to mean? We are told in one place that Judas repented and “went away and hanged himself,” and in another place that the disciples “went out and preached that men should repent.”

Evidently there are two kinds of repentance spoken of in the New Testament. In the Greek (the language in which the New Testament was written), there are two words for repent; and, whatever difference there may be in

the classics, the New Testament writers seem to make a broad distinction between these. The word *Metamelomai* (μεταμέλωμαι), which literally means *to have after-care*, is only used by them six times. In 2 Corinthians vii. 8: "Although I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent." In the New Version "regret" is here used instead of "repent." In Hebrews vii. 21: "The Lord swear, and will not repent, thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec." The idea here is that He would have no "after-care" concerning it. The passage might have been translated, "The Lord swear, and will not regret it." In Matthew xxi. 29: "He answered and said, I will not, but afterward he repented and went." Here again the word might be translated "regret." In the 32d verse of the same chapter we read, "And ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe." It is not a "repentance unto life," an inward renovation, that is spoken of here. The idea is that they did not even regret the course they had taken; for if they had been sorry for it,

they might ultimately have been brought to a saving knowledge of the truth.

Now, the other word, *Metanoeō* (μετανοέω), means to have *a change of mind*, and is used in the New Testament to signify an inward renovation. The word in its noun and verb forms appears fifty-five times. Whenever an entire change of life is spoken of, whenever men are called upon to leave their sins and turn to God, it is this word that is used, and not the other.

In both the passages that we have taken for our text, we have the word "Repent." But in relation to Judas, the word "metamelomai" is used, which means *to have after-care, to regret*, while in the other passage "metanoeō" is used, which means *to have a change of mind*, or, as we might say, a change of life.

But although there is such a difference between these two kinds of repentance, we may mistake the one for the other in our own lives. As the counterfeit closely resembles the real coin, as "the veneering oft outshines the solid wood," we may delude ourselves.

I note, therefore, that one may mourn over

a sinful action without having true repentance. A man commits a certain crime. He is found out and disgraced. He is very sorry that he committed that sin, because of its results. He would give a great deal to be able to recall it. But yet he may have no desire to give himself to God. He may go on committing other sins without any compunctions of conscience. Yes, he is very sorry that he did it, and he may even mistake that feeling for penitence on account of his wrong-doing. But the real cause of his sorrow is, not that he did what was wrong—not that he sinned against his God, but because his sin has found him out.

A person commits a murder. That act haunts him day and night. His soul is filled with remorse. He may even be willing to give his life if only that deed could be thereby recalled; he may confess his crime, he may return to those who hired him to do the deed the price of his iniquity, and yet he may not have any regrets because it was against God that he sinned. If it had been some other sin that would not have haunted him, the fact that he had vio-

lated God's law would have given him no concern.

Now this I take to be the case with Judas. His betrayal of Christ rose up before him, and filled him with remorse. But yet I do not think that he hated sin in its very nature. It was this one particular act of his that he seems to have regretted, not the fact that before God he also had a sinful heart. His soul was not filled with a desire for purification, but with remorse. He did not, like David, pray—

“Create in me a clean heart, O God;
And renew a right spirit within me”;

but he added sin to sin—“he went away and hanged himself.”

So you must see it is quite evident that one can have sorrow over a sinful action without having true repentance.

But we would go much further and say, One may be sorry for all the sins he has ever committed without having this true repentance. A person is out at sea in a storm when at any moment the ship may go to the bottom. Or

he is attacked with sickness, and his life hangs upon a thread. He realizes the awful fact that in a very short time he may have to appear before the bar of God to be judged for eternity. He is in great distress over his sins. Oh, how much he would give if he could only go back and live his life over again that he might be a faithful follower of the Lord Jesus. But is that in itself a sure evidence of true repentance, of a change of life? Is it sure evidence that he hates sin on account of its nature? I venture to say that in the great majority of such cases, just so soon as the danger passes the distress on account of sin also passes. Vows that were then made are soon forgotten. This distress over his sin was not because, in itself, it was hateful to him, but because he dreaded punishment. It was the fear of hell, and not a desire to become holy, that influenced him.

Is it not, therefore, evident that one should not put too much confidence in death-bed repentance? I believe that many have given themselves to God on the death-bed. But have we not great reason to think that many who

have thus professed to have found the Saviour were not influenced by a desire to become holy for its own sake, but were only frightened into it; and if they had recovered, would, like many others, have gone back into their old ways of living?

Now, what lesson should we learn from this? Perhaps there are some here who are saying, *When I come to die, I will repent.* But how do you know that you will? If you are thus deliberately putting off your salvation, does it not mean that you do not desire holiness, but simply wish to escape the punishment due you on account of sin? And if you have that feeling now, is it not probable that you will also have it when you stand face to face with death? But that is not true repentance, without which you cannot get to Heaven.

Then let me say to such, do not trifle any longer with your eternal welfare. Go to God now while you are in health and strength, and give yourselves to Him for time and for eternity; not that you may escape punishment, but that you may be freed from sin.

But I note again that while the sinner who is *outwardly* depraved, cannot truly repent without having, as a result of that repentance, outward reformation, he may have an outward reformation without true repentance. The blasphemer may refrain from his former blasphemy, the rogue may become honest, the drunkard may become a sober man, the libertine may forsake his vices, without truly repenting of their sins. Other feelings may prompt the change. Reputation, a desire to be a man among men, to attain to worldly success, or to please loved ones, a loathing toward his special besetting sin because of its degrading effects—these and similar feelings may sometimes rouse one to effect an outward reformation. Now such a change is good so far as it goes. It is always better to have purity of speech than blasphemy, honesty than rascality, sobriety than drunkenness, virtue than vice. But the trouble with a mere outward reformation is that it does not go far enough. It is simply taking away one of the effects while the cause is allowed to remain; it is but cutting off a

branch while the tree itself is left standing. In other words, it does not affect the person's heart. The fact that that is disloyal to God may not receive from him one moment's consideration. His affections are still earthly. He has no sorrow over a sinful nature, no hatred of sin because of its sinfulness, because it is a violation of God's law, no longing for a time when its last vestige in him shall be destroyed, when he shall be restored to the image of God—holy as He is holy. If he is not fully contented with his present state it is because earthly things cannot satisfy the cravings of the soul, not because he is sick of sin and is longing for perfect purity. Though he is outwardly reformed, he is still inwardly depraved, and needs to repent of his sins just as much as he ever did. Mere outward reformation only looks manward, and but affects to a degree the outward deportment; true repentance looks Godward, and affects the whole life.

And now let us consider some of the elements of true repentance.

When one repents, he must have a right idea of sin. He does not view it as simply an ec-

centricity, a weakness, a misfortune, but as a violation of right, as a sin against God. He does not confine this view to sins that are specially heinous, but to sin in its nature. A wrong thought or an omission of duty he considers a sin against God just as much as an overt act of transgression, even though there may be a difference in the degree of heinousness. He realizes, too, that he himself is a sinner. Previous to this he might not have been able to see much that was wrong in himself, but a great deal in others; but now the language of his heart is, "I have sinned against heaven, and in Thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son." * One may not, indeed, have such deep feelings as some have experienced. While many at the new birth have felt great anguish on account of their sins, there are others who have entered peacefully into the kingdom. Some of them cannot even tell when they were born again. But yet they realize their own sinfulness in the sight of God, and humble themselves before Him.

* Luke xv. 21.

But not only does the repentant one realize that sin is a violation of the law of God, and that he himself is a sinner, but his affections are also changed. Instead of loving sin he hates it; instead of disliking holiness he craves after it. He does not think so much of reward and punishment as of right and wrong. And his will, being on the side of right, will thus manifest itself in his life. He will forsake his old sins, and strive to live to God's glory. Walking "by the Spirit," he "shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary the one to the other; that ye may not do the things that ye would." * That is, the flesh wars against the Spirit in order that we may not do the things the Spirit wishes us to do; while the Spirit wars against the flesh in order that we may not do the things the flesh wishes us to do. Therefore, the Apostle argues, as these are contrary to each other: if one gives himself up to the Spirit, if he walks by His rule, he will not

* Gal. v. 16, 17.

practice the things of the flesh. This does not mean, however, that we will attain to sinlessness here. While in this life the Christian comes very far short of his aspirations. The old nature, though crucified, is still there; for crucifixion is a lingering death. With St. Paul the Christian exclaims, "O, wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?"* Yet, walking "by the Spirit," he will always be honestly striving Godward; and as he strives he will always be getting nearer to the Christlike character. So, should you ask me, What, in a word, is a good evidence of true repentance? I would say, To hate sin and to love holiness, to depart from evil and to do good. Any repentance that will not stand this test is spurious.

Having considered the nature of repentance let us look for a moment at its necessity in order to salvation. This might be viewed from two standpoints.

1st. That of divine law; and

2d. Our own personal character.

* Rom. vii. 24.

1st. Divine law.

Sin is a violation of God's law. A community living in sin is in open rebellion against God. This is equally true of an individual or a whole race. The sinner is a rebel; a community of sinners is a community of rebels; a race of sinners is a race of rebels.

A rebellion is sometimes justifiable. When a government is tyrannical, peaceful remonstrances having failed, I believe in an appeal to arms and to the God of nations. I believe that the people of these United States of America were justified in rebelling against the tyranny of George III.; and that right was vindicated and liberty enthroned with their success. I would hail with gladness such a revolution in Russia as would forever drive despotism from its throne, and give to her people the rights of which God and nature have made them the lawful heirs. Whenever a rebellion has Right on its side, its seeming violation of the respect due to government is in obedience to a higher law—the law of equity. Under such circumstances, even though the rebellion be crushed,

the government in reality loses none of its true dignity by giving a full pardon to all the rebels and granting them their just demands. Great Britain acted thus with the Dutch Boers of South Africa when she might have forced them into subjection; and the world has honored her for it.

But suppose that a body of men should rebel against good government, against good laws, against right, the case would be altogether different. Suppose, too, that the government having offered pardon and restoration to all the privileges of citizenship to those of the rebels who would submit, certain of them rejected these offers, and held out in their wicked rebellion, what should be done with them? Rewarded or punished? You would say, The honor of the law must be upheld. If we are not to have anarchy instead of order the government must inflict on them the penalty of their crime.

Now apply this principle to the question in hand. God's government is absolutely just. He rules the universe with perfect equity. The best of earthly governments may make

mistakes; but the All-Wise Governor is free from even the possibility of error. Moreover, the code of moral laws which He has given us is for our own good. They are not made in a whimsical, arbitrary way, but are eternal in their principle. Even if God had not given them to us, to go contrary to what they teach would bring shame and misery upon us. So you see that God does not arbitrarily make a moral law, and say, Because I made this the violation thereof will be in itself injurious to you; but He knows what would in itself be injurious to us, and demoralizing to good government, and He forbids us by His law from doing these things.

But notwithstanding that he had such a ruler, man deliberately rebelled against Him. But God loved man; therefore, that He might consistently offer pardon to the guilty, the Second Person of the Godhead satisfied the honor of the violated law. And now the proclamation goes forth to all rebels, that if they will but submit themselves through Jesus Christ, and become loyal citizens—if they will

hate sin and love holiness, if they will depart from evil, and do good, they will be saved. Now suppose that any still hold out in rebellion, suppose they still spurn the authority and love of God, if the honor of the divine law is to be upheld, if all of God's moral creation is to be impressed with its sanctity, the penalty must be enforced. So you see from the standpoint of divine law that repentance is necessary if we would be saved from its penalty.

2d. Our own personal character.

Salvation is something more than escape from the penalty of the law. It also means freedom from the power and defilement of sin. For the penalty is only the consequence; sin itself is its cause, and is the greater evil. Now how can we be freed from sin? We must come under the transforming influences of the Holy Spirit. But in what way? As machines, or as creatures of free will? Certainly as creatures of free will. No man is forced into God's kingdom; no man in possession of his faculties can be purified from sin and fitted for Heaven

without the concurrence and co-operation of his own will. Such would be a moral impossibility, a contradiction in itself. But we cannot have this concurrence and co-operation of the will without repentance; for repentance itself is a "change of mind," a going over of our affections and will from Satan to God.

So, looking at the question either from the standpoint of divine law or of our own personal character, reason, as well as the Word of God, tells us that in order to be saved we must have a change of life, that we must repent, that "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." *

Therefore in God's name I call upon those who are living away from Him, who are in rebellion against Him, to repent. But perhaps you say, How can I? Is not my nature so depraved that I cannot of myself turn to God? While I detest certain mean, sinful actions I cannot hate sin in its very nature, as something that is in opposition to God. While I admire certain actions that come from having Christ in

* John iii. 3.

the heart, I cannot love holiness. Now why ask me to repent when of myself I cannot do so? To this I would reply, It is true that you are not able of yourself to change your affections from the things of this world to God. The spirit of repentance must come from God Himself. And so St. Peter, speaking of Jesus before the Jewish Sanhedrin, said, "Him did God exalt with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins."* St. Paul, writing to Timothy, says, "In meekness correcting them that oppose themselves; if peradventure God may give them repentance unto the knowledge of the truth."† We read, too, how when Peter reviewed the case of Cornelius before his Jewish brethren, they "glorified God, saying, Then to the Gentiles also hath God granted repentance unto life."‡

Yet, though Scripture and experience declare that repentance is a gift from God, both the Scriptures and conscience throw the responsibility of repentance upon man. God "com-

* Acts v. 31. † 2 Timothy ii. 25. ‡ Acts xi. 18.

mandeth men that they should all everywhere repent." *

But does God ask us to do something that we cannot do? I will answer this question by citing the case of the man who had the withered hand.† It was powerless; yet Christ told him to stretch it out. Suppose the man had said, You must be mocking me, for you know I cannot do so; and had refused to try, would life have been restored to his hand? I think not. But in obedience to the command he made the attempt, and divine power healed him. So when God calls upon us to repent we may be sure that He is not mocking our weakness. He in effect tells us that we cannot do this of ourselves; but if we wait upon Him, His Spirit will impart it to us. It will effect in us "A change of mind," or as we say, "A change of heart," so that we will hate sin and love holiness, and depart from evil and do good. We must, therefore, use the means of grace. If we do not so, we are responsible for the loss of the blessings, repentance included,

* Acts xvii. 30.

† Luke vi. 6-11.

which a diligent use of these means would bring to us.

Now if any of you have not this true repentance, ask God for it. Always keeping the matter before you as the most important thing of life, continually plead with God. State your case to Him, squarely and honestly, and ask Him to help you. Did not Christ say, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." "Or what man is there of you, who, if his son shall ask for a loaf, will give him a stone; or if he shall ask for a fish, will give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?"* Then pray.

You should also study God's word. Do not read it as a routine duty which has to be gone through with; but study it prayerfully, in order that you may know God's will concerning you, and that you may comply with it.

Also read books of a religious nature. I do

* Matt. vii. 7, 9-11.

not mean that because a certain book treats on religious subjects you should read it. It may not be written in a way that will do you any good. Some religious books help some persons; others help other persons. Read such as will interest and help yourself.

Attend the Lord's house. Before you go there ask God for a blessing on the services; and look for some message for yourself.

If you are practicing anything that is sinful, anything that your conscience does not approve, give it up as you would something which you felt to be injurious to your best interests.

In short, use all the means of grace. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate."* Thus make the effort to stretch out the withered hand, and you, too, will be healed by divine power. "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you."†

* Luke xiii. 24.

† James iv. 8.

VII.

CHRISTIAN UNITY AND HUMILITY.

“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.”—PHILIPPIANS ii. 3.

PAUL, the great Apostle to the Gentiles, is in Rome, a prisoner for the Gospel's sake. Thinking that he might be in straitened circumstances the church at Philippi sent him a contribution by Epaphroditus. This worthy man, through his zeal to advance the cause of Christ, becomes very ill. To use Paul's own words, “For the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me.”* However, having recovered, he becomes, perhaps we might say, homesick;† and so Paul sends him back, making use of this opportunity to send also a letter to the church of Philippi—the first-fruits

* Phil. ii. 30.

† Phil. ii. 26.

of his labors in Europe, his beloved church, or as he himself expresses it, "My joy and crown."

The question may be asked, What was there in the state of this church that drew forth from Paul the strong appeal to unity and humility which the first eleven verses of this 2d chapter contain? Some writers hold that it was divided into factions like the churches of Corinth and Galatia; that the Judaizing element had crept in and propagated their doctrines in opposition to the more Christian teaching of the Apostle. They see in this his reason for urging them to unity; and for the warm denunciation of the Judaizing teachers, in the 3d chapter—"Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision." There is no just ground, however, for this opinion. There does indeed appear to have been some difference, we know not of what nature, between two prominent women, Euodia and Syntyche; for in the 4th chapter he exhorts them "to be of the same mind in the Lord." But the tone of the epistle is so commendatory that we see no reason for supposing that the church had been di-

vided by faction. The reason for this strong appeal to unity may be found elsewhere. You will remember that these Judaizing teachers had tried to draw some of the other churches from the simplicity of the Gospel. Those of Corinth and Galatia they had already split into factions. We read, too, how when Paul was in Antioch "certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, saying, Except ye be circumcised after the custom of Moses, ye cannot be saved." * Even in Rome, where Paul was now a prisoner, they were doing their utmost against him. Of these he no doubt speaks in the first chapter of this Epistle. In the fifteenth verse he says, "Some indeed preach Christ out of envy and strife." In the sixteenth verse he adds that they "preach Christ of contention, supposing to add affliction to my bonds." Now no doubt the question often came to the Apostle whether these Judaizing teachers would ever assail his beloved church at Philippi, and divide it into factions. With this on his mind, and not because they

* Acts xv. 1.

had already caused dissension there, he warns the brethren against these and urges them to oneness of mind. He would also have them so absorbed in the cause of Christ as to exclude self:—"Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves."

Though our circumstances are different from those of the Philippians, yet human nature is the same as it was then. To us, therefore, as well as to them are these words applicable.

"Let nothing be done through strife." What does this mean? Did not Paul himself strive with Barnabas? And we think that under the circumstances he was right. He also speaks approvingly of himself when he tells how at Antioch he "resisted" Peter "to the face."* But here he says, "Let nothing be done through strife." What does he mean? If we would look at the New Version we might get some more light on the matter. Instead of "strife" it uses the more correct word, "faction"—"doing nothing through faction." The idea is, that

* Gal. ii. 11.

we should do nothing through a "party spirit," through "a contentious spirit of faction." We must not fail to distinguish between this and "strife." When principle is at stake we must strive. We must be as firm as a rock. We must not only speak boldly, but if occasion requires it, we must act boldly, even though we have to stand alone, even though our only companions be the jeers of our opponents. He is but a coward or a knave who cries "Peace, Peace," when duty demands that the only condition on which we consent to peace is a complete victory for principle. All great reforms have been accomplished by heavy blows against strong opposition; and the reforms of the future in which we will be called upon to act our part will only be obtained in the same way. But let us take care that the controlling power that makes us strive is "duty," and not "a contentious spirit of faction." For it is just possible that we may be on the side of Right, without being actuated by its spirit. Let us strive to emulate the noble British general, the Duke of Wellington, and your own illustrious soldier,

General Grant, who while they fought zealously for their respective countries at the call of duty, yet hated war.

But as there are times when it is our duty to strive there are also times when it is our duty not to strive. Hence the necessity of having a general rule to guide us. Let that rule be, Let us never be controlled by the contentious spirit of faction; let us never mingle in strife except where principle demands it; and then let us strive as if for all that we are worth.

Now suppose we honestly endeavor to carry out this principle in daily life. I would specially draw your attention—

1st. To the family. If there is one place on earth where things should run smoothly, it is in the home circle. When all the members do not endeavor, in the spirit of love, to bear one another's burdens, when they are not patient with each other's weaknesses, when the spirit of selfishness and faction takes possession of any one, things become very unpleasant for the whole family.

Do you not know that to a great extent the

home is the training-school for the State and the Church and for Heaven. That training, too, is done more by example than by precept. Little eyes see the way older ones go; and little feet are apt to run in the same direction. Let the home atmosphere be healthy, let it be fragrant with courtesy, kindness, and love, and the children breathing that into their spiritual lungs will be blessed by it, and the cause of God will be thereby advanced. But let the atmosphere be filled with the miasma of selfishness and contention, and these children will be injured by it, and the cause of God will correspondingly suffer. Let each one of us, then, do our utmost to have love's sweet benediction rest upon our households.

2d. To the church. There should be a spirit of unity in the congregation. We cannot always think alike; but in our differences let there be a spirit of love and forbearance. How easy it is to start a church quarrel. Some matter comes up that should be settled without any difficulty. But the church members take sides on it. One side, perhaps both, will not

listen to reason. The affair grows from bad to worse, until the congregation is weakened, and the cause of Christ injured. And when some one asks the cause of the trouble, everybody is ashamed to think that such a mountain grew out of such a mole-hill.

There should also be a spirit of unity between the different Protestant, evangelical branches of the Church. The cause of Christ has been scandalized by the factional quarrels of different denominations. At times, instead of fighting the common enemy, they have drawn their swords against each other. Often the cause has been so trivial that it has reminded us of the war among the Liliputians of which Dean Swift tells us in "Gulliver's Travels." In the kingdom of Liliput certain persons broke their eggs on the large end. These were called "Bigendians." Others, however, broke theirs on the small end. This difference of opinion as to which end of the egg should be broken was the cause of hard feeling between the two parties; for each claimed that its way only was the right way. At last they went to war over

it, and many thousands were slain on both sides; although the law expressly said that one might break the egg on the convenient end.

When denominations agree on the essential doctrines they should not let the minor ones raise a barrier between them. They should not quarrel about the end of the egg that is to be broken. I am not pleading for church union. I believe that the denominational system has done much good, and will still do good. That such a union will come some day I firmly believe. But it cannot be forced. We are not ripe for it yet. In the meantime let us treat each other as divisions of the same army, fighting for the one grand cause, under the one beloved Commander. Let us indeed be loyal to our own army corps. Let us strive to make that as efficient as possible. Let there be, if you please, an honest rivalry as to which shall capture the greatest number of strongholds from the enemy. But yet let each rejoice over the others' victories and mourn over their losses. For their gain is the whole army's gain; their loss the army's loss. Let each strive to rescue

as many prisoners as possible from the Libby prison of sin, and drill them into valiant soldiers for Christ; but let none do anything to weaken the other. Let not one army corps, through a feeling of faction, strive to entice away soldiers from another corps. Such conduct injures the cause of Christ, for it fosters a contentious spirit of faction. I am sorry to say that too often professing Christians rejoice more when a prominent member leaves his own church and comes to theirs than when one leaves the path of sin and turns to God.

My dear friends, I do not say these things to you in the way of censure. So far as I know, this congregation does not believe in strengthening itself at the expense of sister churches. It is but recently that I was very much pleased by having one of our Sabbath-school teachers say to me, "What shall I do? There are children belonging to another church who want to join my class. I do not care to take them, because it might make a hard feeling; but as they say they will not attend their own Sabbath-school, I do not like to turn them away. What shall

I do?" The answer I gave might be a good general rule to go by. I said, "Do not encourage them to come. But if they *will* come, do not turn them away." This rule is also applicable to grown-up persons. If they attend other churches, do not encourage them to come to ours. But if they do come, make them welcome. Treat them as brethren.

We should strive to draw in those who do not attend any church. In this way let us build up our own congregation. And while we work and pray for our beloved Presbyterian Church, let us still be far more anxious to lead sinners to Christ than to make Presbyterians of them.

"Doing nothing through faction." Wherever that contentious spirit of faction manifests itself, whether in social or ecclesiastical relations, or elsewhere, it tends to engender hard feelings, and to do much injury. How necessary then for the welfare of the individual, of the family, of the church, how necessary if we wish to live in close communion with that God who has said, "Love one another,"* to strive by

* John xv. 12.

His help to obey this injunction, "Doing nothing through faction."

But 2d. We are also admonished against doing anything through "vainglory." Or as we would say, "*through show*," to "*appear well*," to "*glorify ourselves*." This admonition is as applicable to us as to the Philippians. Ever since the time when our first parents listened to the seductive words of the Tempter, "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil,"* this spirit of vainglory has been doing much mischief in the world. It has been one of the great disturbing elements. It has turned brother against brother, family against family, nation against nation. It has dried up the milk of human kindness in many breasts; and shed rivers of human blood. Even now in the internal affairs of the country, when the power of the sword has given way to the ballot-box, this evil, disturbing spirit of vainglory still asserts itself. Men cater to the lowest element, to the rabble and to the rum-shops, in order that they may rise to power; though in doing

* Gen. iii. 5.

so they tread on broken hearts and on their country's honor. Even the Church herself has been assailed by this disturbing element. Forgetting the lessons of humility which were taught by Christ and His Apostles, her leaders soon came to vie with each other for ecclesiastical pre-eminence, and with earthly rulers for temporal power, so that she was rent asunder by factions, and became exceeding vile. Vainglory! Oh, what a power for evil it is. No wonder that Shakespeare says:

“Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away ambition;
By that sin fell the angels; how can Man, then,
The image of his Maker, hope to win light.”

Let nothing be done through vainglory. How necessary it is for us to keep these words ever before us. For this spirit seeks to control the very best actions in life. It prompts us to help the starving little child on the street, not that it might be benefited thereby, but that others may think well of ourselves. It is so pleasant to have persons speak highly of us, to have them say, “How kind-hearted he is.” I wonder if any one of us has ever done a kind act

which would not have been done if no one but God and ourselves were to have known about it? Persons are tempted to give largely for educational purposes, for the alleviation of distress, ay, even for the printing of Bibles and for the evangelization of the heathen, in order that their names may appear in print as the generous donors of such and such an amount. In the work of bringing souls to Christ by direct, personal effort, one is often assailed by this same vain spirit. An inordinate desire to be well spoken of in church circles, to be known as having added so many hundred names to the communion roll, as having built up a congregation from weakness to great strength, often seeks to overshadow the desire to work for God's glory and the good of our fellow-men. Sad, indeed, will it be if at the Judgment-seat some who have been the means of bringing many souls to God will be found themselves to be castaways; to whom the Judge shall say, *You labored in order that you might receive the praise of men: therefore you have already received your reward.* Even at the throne of

grace, in the immediate presence of God, one is sometimes tempted to think more of how his fellow-men may regard his prayer than how God regards it. Vainglory says, "Use nice language, express deep thought, and then others will say, 'Oh, what a fine prayer that was. How smart that person must be.'"

There is no act so good that vainglory will not try to control it. How necessary, then, that we "watch and pray," that we take unto ourselves the whole armor of God that we may be able to resist the wiles of the Devil. It is not a sin to be tempted. The sin is in giving way to the temptation. So, should we allow ourselves to be controlled by this spirit of vanity, of self-glorification, our actions, good though they may be in themselves, will be as much of an abomination in God's sight as were the acts of those in our Lord's day who sounded a trumpet before them in the synagogues and in the streets, that they might have glory of men.* Let us therefore strive by divine grace, whether

* Mat. vi. 2.

we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, to do all to the glory of God.

But the text not only enjoins upon us to abstain from doing anything through faction or vainglory, but it adds, "In lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves." What are we to understand this to mean? Are we to consider another better than ourselves even though we may know that he is not? There are two persons. One of them is a most devoted child of God, the other follows Christ afar off. How can that devoted servant of Jehovah, if he uses his intellect, say that that weak, sickly Christian is better than he? He cannot. When he measures himself by God's standard of right, by Jesus Christ, he may feel that he is the chief of sinners; yet he must see, when he compares himself with the lukewarm Christian, that that man is not so good as he is. What then are we to understand the Apostle to mean when he says that in lowliness of mind we should esteem others better than ourselves?

The Greek word which is here translated "better" does not refer to moral goodness.

The same word is used in two other places to denote temporal dignity. In Rom. xiii. 1 we read, "Let every soul be in subjection to the HIGHER powers." Meaning by "higher powers" earthly rulers. In 1st Peter ii. 13 we read, "Be subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as SUPREME"; and so on. Now the words "higher" and "supreme" in these two passages, and the word "better" in our text, are all the same in the original. They are simply different translations of the one Greek word. And so the text might read, "In lowliness of mind let each count other higher than themselves." You will remember that the Apostle is urging in favor of unity. He says, "If there is therefore any comfort in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender mercies and compassions, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." And then he as much as says, *This means, of course, that you are not to do anything through faction; you are not to be puffed up with a feeling of your own*

importance; but in honor you are to prefer one another. Having this spirit of love which binds all in unity, they would not be striving for pre-eminence, for "love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up." And is not this what Christ taught when He washed His disciples' feet? It was at the passover feast. They had been disputing among themselves who should be the greatest. Perhaps it was over the order in which they were to sit at the table. Who was going to have the place of honor? Who would have to take the lowest seat? And so Christ rises from supper, and taking off His upper garments, He girded Himself with a towel, and poured water into the basin "like a slave who was about to perform the meanest service." And having washed their feet, He said unto them, "If I then, the Lord and the Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done to you." In lowliness of mind He would have them count others higher than themselves. The Church has in this act of humility an ob-

ject-lesson for all time. None of us should seek to rank above our brethren. Rather should we "gird ourselves with humility, to serve one another."* "In lowliness of mind" we should be ready to take the lowest seat. Let us learn to recognize our neighbor's worth as well as our own:—"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."

Allow me to emphasize the words, "In lowliness of mind." We are not simply to take a lowly position. We may do that through vainglory. In our Lord's day the Pharisees took the chief seats that others might think well of them.† But the modern Pharisee, when it suits his purpose, takes the lowest seat for the same reason. His face and deportment on such occasions are put forward as signboards on which is written, "*Look, everybody; see how humble I am.*" And at the same time it is done through vainglory. Too many of these persons, like their prototypes, "devour widows' houses, and

* 1 Peter v. 5.

† Luke xi. 43.

for a pretence make long prayers.”* No, it is not a lowly position, merely, that the Apostle means. Neither does he simply refer to a *lack* of vainglory. One may be free from vanity; he may treat others as if they were better than himself, but he may not have “lowliness of mind,” in its highest and best sense. That implies a true opinion of oneself. We must realize something of our own unworthiness—that we are sinners by nature and by practice; and even though we have been regenerated and are striving to do right, whatever goodness we may have is not of ourselves, but is of God through Christ. As St. Paul says, “Not I, but Christ liveth in me.” Or as John Newton once said, when he saw a person go by who was low down in the scale of humanity, “There goes John Newton, only for the grace of God.”

If we have this lowliness of mind will we not treat others as if they were better than ourselves?

Having, then, the same mind which was in Christ Jesus, who, though being in the form of

* Mark xii. 40.

God, made Himself of no reputation, and took the form of a servant for the sake of others, let us strive to do "nothing through faction or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind each counting other better than himself."

VIII.

BURDENS AND THE BURDEN- BEARER.

“Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee :

He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.”

—PSALM lv. 22.

ELIPHAZ, the Temanite, one of Job's comforters, expressed a solemn truth when he said, “Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.” *

Sin has brought untold misery to mankind. It has left the race groaning under an intolerable burden. But, blessed be God, “where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” † While the servants of God are not exempt from trouble they have the divine assurance, “My grace is sufficient for thee : for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” ‡ And so we turn

* Job v. 7.

† Romans v. 20.

‡ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

with relief from the philosophical statement of Eliphaz to the trustful, faith-inspiring words of the Psalmist,

“Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee :

He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.”

I note in the first place that the Christian can cast his burden of temptation upon the Lord. I do not mean that one can go unnecessarily into the way of temptation, and reasonably expect that the Lord is going to help him. Neither do I mean that one is to do nothing himself, that he is not to put forth every effort against the assaults of Satan. The faithful Christian will keep out of forbidden paths ; he will do his utmost to resist the powers of darkness. But walk where he will and strive as he will, the tempter will assail him.

But liable as we are to temptations of all kinds, many persons, if not all, are weak in some special point ; or in other words, they have a propensity to some particular sin.

1st. There are those who have *inherited* this propensity. An acquaintance of mine told me

some time ago of a friend who continually had to fight against the appetite for strong drink, although he himself had never tasted it. If in going past a saloon he caught the fumes of liquor, that terrible craving would assert itself. Here was an inherited propensity for strong drink. There are those, too, who have a strong propensity to cruelty and murder. Others are of a morbid, jealous, suspicious nature. Others are disposed to be irritable, fault-finding, selfish, domineering. A friend of mine surprised me one day by telling how he had had to fight and pray for years against an inordinate love of money. I suppose there are many Christian men and women whom we little suspect, who day by day are assailed by an inherited propensity to some particular sin. It is a continual struggle with them. And oh, with what frequent longings must these look forward to the time when they shall stand around the throne of God, free from every temptation.

2d. There are those who have *acquired* it. It has come to them as a result of their wrong-doing. Man, to a certain extent,

has the shaping of his character in his own hands. If he cherishes the good, that character will grow purer and stronger. Solomon compares this to the light when morning dawns. He says, "The path of the righteous is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." * But if one gives way to temptation, if he cherishes evil, the character will become fouler and weaker; and especially that particular evil to which he is addicted, will continually increase in its power over him. Now, it is against this propensity to some particular sin, acquired before their conversion, that many Christians continually have to struggle. For you know that when a man is converted his spiritual foes are not all overcome. His conversion means that he has turned over from the side of sin and Satan to God's side. But the same temptations assail him still; though now instead of giving way he fights against them; instead of loving the sin he hates it. The one who has been a drunkard has his appetite to fight against; the former libertine

* Prov. iv. 18.

his foul imagination. He who has been untruthful has to contend against untruthfulness; he who has been dishonest against dishonesty; he who has been a passionate man against his temper; the one who has been a slanderer against evil speaking. Is the struggle sometimes a hard one? Hard! To the tempted one it sometimes feels as if all hell were in it.

Then, too, one is sometimes unavoidably placed in circumstances that bring temptations that are exceeding severe. Among these might be named—

1st. Ill health. The system is run down. I will not say that all such cases of illness are unavoidable. Many persons are ill because they do not take the care of themselves that they might. Some of them eat too much stuff, such as cakes and pastry, that is as hard to digest as India-rubber. Some do not take enough outdoor exercise when really there is nothing to hinder them. Some are so anxious to accumulate money or to build up a business that they take no time for recreation and not enough for sleep. To such I would say: *Get better.*

Have more respect for the laws of health. But on the other hand, there are those who are thus ill through no fault of their own; some of them, perhaps, as a result of their obedience to the higher law of self-sacrifice for others. Now, if one is naturally inclined to irritability or morbidness, if he has a tendency to sit down and weave out of his imagination grievances that have no foundation in real life, these things will likely become more aggravated if his system is run down, or if he is the victim of such a trouble as dyspepsia. Under such circumstances he will probably be fiercely assailed with temptations peculiar to such a state of body and mind.

2d. The associations into which one is sometimes thrown. Christians are often placed in circumstances where they meet temptations of social life, which they cannot escape—temptations of various kinds, but all strong and subtle. Day by day they encounter these fierce, relentless enemies. If they could get away from them they gladly would; but they cannot. They have to grapple with them

in what may be a life or death struggle. At other times circumstances are such that one has to grapple with the fierce temptations of business life. The merchant feels the pressure of hard times. Large "book accounts" still remain unsettled; much of his goods that he counted on selling are still on the shelves. Notes are coming due, which he cannot meet. He wants to save his credit. He sees a way in which he can make so much money by taking advantage of some technical point. In the sight of God and of his own conscience that act would be dishonest, sinful. Shall he do it, or shall he not? It is easy for us to say, "Do right"; but with that man it is a tremendous struggle. The employé is asked to do some dishonest act, or to work on the Lord's day. It is easy for a man with a full purse, or who can get another situation, to say "No." But when one has a wife and a family of little ones to feed, when he has aged parents to support, and no other way open of earning a livelihood for them, it is not so easy to say, "I will not do that dishonest act"; "I will not desecrate

the Lord's day." The greatest struggle I have ever had, or ever expect to have, was when I threw up a position where I was required to work on Sunday, and, because there was no other position to be had there, left my home and mother, trusting in God's promise that has since become so dear to me, "For them that honor me I will honor." *

Now perhaps there is here some child of God who day by day is subjected to fierce temptation. May be you have inherited or acquired some propensity to sin. Perhaps circumstances are such that Satan assails you with special power, and you find it hard to resist. Sometimes the inward struggle is so great that you tremble from head to foot. At times you have almost given way; or perhaps again and again you have stumbled. You are afraid that eventually it may overcome you. Oh, what an awful burden this is. Then, brother, cast it on the great Burden-bearer, and He will give you daily grace for daily temptation. Do you not know that the heart of the Eternal is beating

* 1 Samuel ii. 30.

in sympathy with you? The Bible says, "For we have not an high-priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help us in time of need." * Trust God for the living present, and let not the unborn future disturb you. Put forth indeed every effort against temptation as if everything depended on yourself; but at the same time get close to God, and trust implicitly in Him. For "there hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able: but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." †

"Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee:

He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved."

* Heb. iv. 15, 16.

† 1 Cor. x. 13.

I notice again that the Christian can cast his burden of trouble upon the Lord.

There are financial troubles. You sat down and made your calculations. You allowed a fair margin "to go and come on." But, as Burns so quaintly expresses it,

"The best laid schemes of mice and men,
Gang aft aglee."

Something has turned up and upset your calculations. The ships have been delayed; and Shylock demands the pound of flesh. Notes are overdue which you are unable to meet; bills are coming in on which is written, "Can you oblige us by remitting at your earliest convenience?" You are worried and troubled over it. The burden rests heavily upon your shoulders. Then while you do your very utmost to better things, roll this burden of worry upon the shoulders of the Omnipotent. You feel, perhaps, that you cannot take these business troubles to God. Why can you not if you are walking in the path of duty, if your business is a legitimate one? When it is His will

that there should be farmers, merchants, mechanics, and so forth, can we not do our work in His name, and to His glory? Not only can we, but it would be highly pleasing to the Lord to have His children, to have us, come into His presence at the close of the day and review that day's work. And if any one has been defrauded or oppressed by us, or in any other way has suffered wrong at our hands, to confess it to God, and to make it right with the injured one the very first thing next morning. If we have resisted temptation, if we have done some noble act, if we have set God's glory before us, to thank Him for His divine grace which enabled us so to do. If we have had success in our business, gratefully to acknowledge it; if we have had adversity, to cast our burden upon the Lord, who will sustain us, who will never suffer the righteous to be moved. God delights in having His children commit their ways to Him in loving, childlike confidence. But let us not dictate to God in our troubles. When He takes a seat with us in our buggy, and on the way to glory He drives us down through the

deep waters of affliction, let us not try to take the reins in our own hands.

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart,
And lean not upon thine own understanding;
In all thy ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct thy paths.”*

Then again there are the private troubles. Perhaps some of them are of such a nature that you do not care to let anybody know about them; and yet they are all the harder to bear on that account. Day after day they rob life of its pleasures; night after night you lie awake over them. Sometimes you feel the big tear-drops stealing down your cheeks; sometimes your sorrow is so deep that you cannot find relief in tears. Oh, how consoling it would be to lay all your troubles on some big, loving heart, one that you could trust, one that could fully sympathize with you. Do you not know that there is such an One, that He dearly loves you, and wishes to bear your burden for you? It is the Eternal God, the Creator and Ruler of Heaven and earth, who longs

* Prov. iii. 5, 6.

to have you come to Him, as a child would to its loving mother, and laying your head on His bosom, to tell Him all your griefs. He says, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." *

"Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee:

He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved."

But, perhaps, more crushing still are family troubles.

It is supposed that the occasion of this Psalm from which my text is taken, was the widespread conspiracy of Absalom to seize the throne of his father. David was having a hard time in his family. He had himself, years before this, broken up another family in a mean way; and though he had bitterly repented of it, he was reaping what he had sown. He was now an old man, and his son whom he loved was plotting against him. His trusted adviser, Ahithophel, whom he had treated as a "companion" and "familiar friend" † had also joined the conspirators. Why did he

* Isaiah lxvi. 13.

† Ps. lv. 13; Ps. xli. 9.

not nip this rebellion in the bud? We learn from the 41st Psalm, which was evidently written at an earlier stage of this conspiracy, that he was very ill. There he prays that God would have mercy upon him, and raise him up that he might "requite them"—that is, that he might punish the conspirators. When this 55th Psalm was written, the conspiracy had become very strong; and it is probable that he had not yet so far recovered from his illness as to possess sufficient strength of body or of mind to deal with it. Then, too, his love for his rebellious son, and perhaps a sense of God's judgments upon himself on account of his own great sin, might have unnerved him. In his trouble he pours out his soul to God. He says:

"I am restless in my complaint, and moan;
Because of the voice of the enemy.

.

My heart is sore pained within me;
And the terrors of death are fallen upon me.
Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me,
And horror hath overwhelmed me,
And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove!
Then would I fly away, and be at rest."*

* Ps. lv. 2, 4-6.

But though his trouble is great, he remembers that God still reigns. And so addressing himself he exclaims :

“Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee :

He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.”

Family troubles ! But these are not confined to David's time. Multitudes are groaning under them now. Starvation stares many a family in the face. Only those who have passed through such a trouble can realize the humiliation that is attached to it, the anxiety which is so apt to oppress one. Little mouths have to be fed ; perhaps there is a sick one that needs special care. But if you are a servant of Jehovah, if you are doing your best to keep the wolf from the door, you can with confidence cast your burden upon the Lord, trusting that He will give you what is best for you. Christ says, “Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings? and not one of them is forgotten in the sight of God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not : ye are of

more value than many sparrows." * If God has seen fit to send this affliction, He has some wise end in view. Remember that an empty cupboard often brings fatness of soul, for it sends us to Him who alone is the source of true life.

With others it is the death-angel that alarms them. His shadow falls upon the face of some loved member of the household. They are afraid that finally, having baffled medical aid and gentle, skilful nursing, he will swoop down and take that loved one from them.

With others a darker shadow than even death's has crossed the threshold. Full rein has been given to appetite and passion; and the dissipation and disgrace of one member have well-nigh broken the hearts of the rest.

With others there is a skeleton in the house. It may be hidden from outsiders. When they come in it is shut up in the closet; but when they go away it is taken out again. In many families where things are supposed to go nicely, and all are happy, some noble heart is breaking

* Luke xii. 6, 7.

because of ill treatment ; while to keep up appearances the face is forced to wear a smile. Family troubles ! How often is that place which should be the type of Heaven turned into the ante-room of Hell. But oh, breaking heart, while before the cold, unsympathetic world you have to wear a smile, you can tell all your troubles to Him who

—“ healeth the broken in heart,
And bindeth up their wounds.” *

He may not take them away ; but if not, He will give you strength to bear them. He says, “ My grace is sufficient for thee : for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” † We sometimes hear persons say, “ I do not know how I ever survived those troubles.” Well, I can tell how some have been able to bear up so well. Day by day they cast their burden upon the Lord, finding in Him “ a very present help in trouble.” ‡ Day by day let us cast our burdens upon Him. Let us not look ahead to the dark, unknown to-morrow, and

* Psalm cxlvii. 3. † 2 Cor. xii. 9. ‡ Psalm xlv. 1.

borrow anxiety from it. If to-morrow brings its special trials our God will give us special grace. "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." * "Blessed be the Lord, who daily beareth our burden." †

"I know not what may befall me ; God spreads a mist
before my eyes ;
At every step on my onward path He makes new
scenes to rise ;
And every joy He sends me
Comes with a sudden and strange surprise.

"I see not a step before me, as I tread on another
year.
The past is still in God's keeping ; the future His
mercy will clear ;
And what looks dark in the distance
May brighten as it grows near.

"It may be the bitter Marah is less bitter than I think ;
The Lord may sweeten the water before I come to
drink.
But if Marah must be Marah
He will stand Himself by the brink.

"Oh, blessed, happy ignorance ! 'Tis better not to
know.
It keeps me so still in the tender arms that would not
let me go ;

* Deut. xxxiii, 25.

† Psalm lxviii. 19.

It hushes my soul to rest
On the bosom that loves me so.

"And so I go on not knowing. I would not if I might.
I'd rather walk with Him by faith, than go alone by
sight—
I'd rather walk with Him in the dark
Than go alone in the light.

"My heart shrinks back from the trials the future may
disclose ;
Yet I never had a trial but what the dear Lord chose.
So I force the coming tears back
With the whispered words, He knows."

"Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain
thee :
He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved."

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